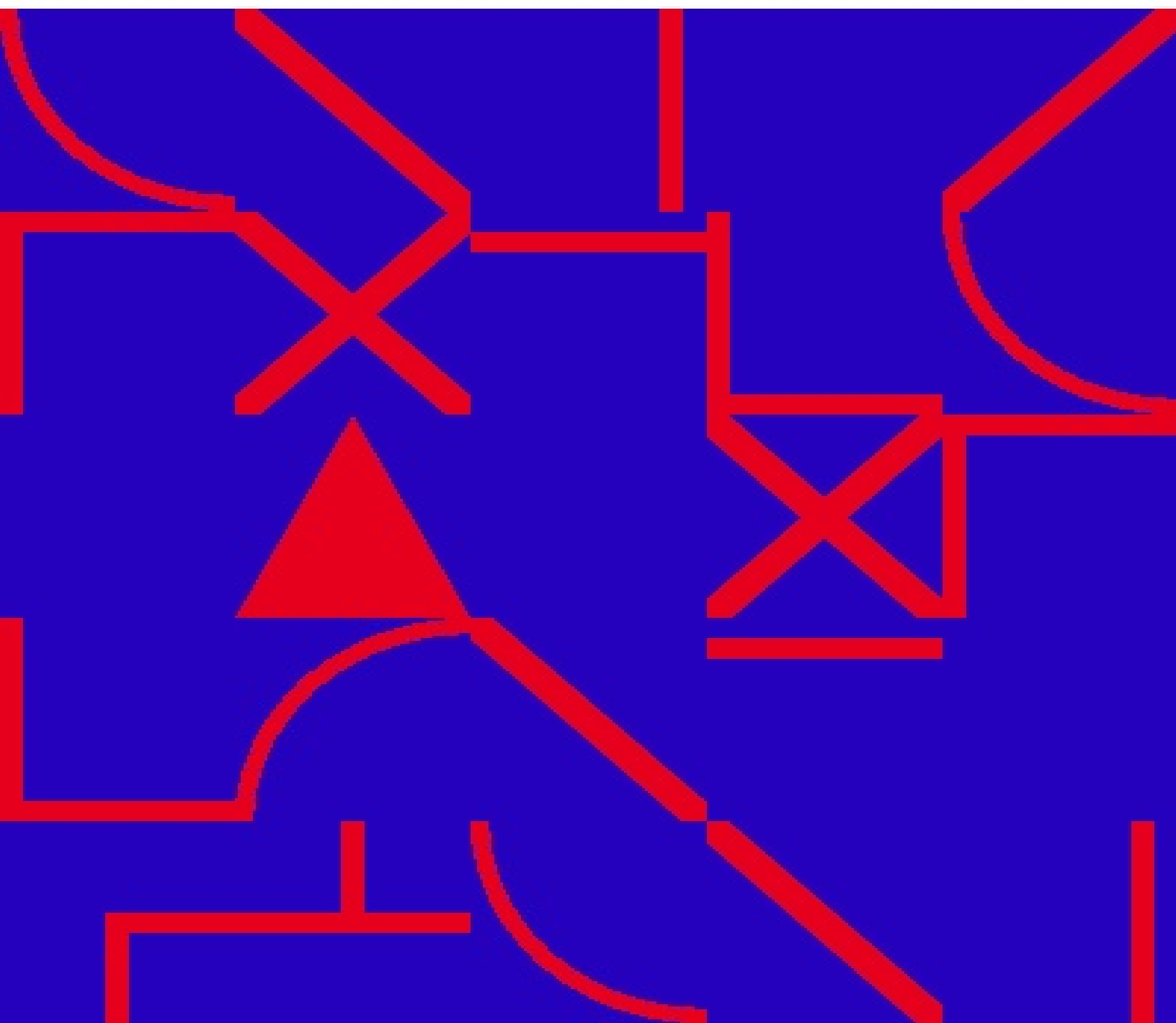


"My Novel" — Volume 01

Edward Bulwer Lytton Lytton, Baron



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"MY NOVEL."

BOOK FIRST.

INITIAL CHAPTER.

SHOWING HOW MY NOVEL CAME TO BE WRITTEN.

Scene, the hall in UNCLE ROLAND'S tower; time, night; season, winter.

MR. CAXTON is seated before a great geographical globe, which he is turning round leisurely, and "for his own recreation," as, according to Sir Thomas Browne, a philosopher should turn round the orb of which that globe professes to be the representation and effigies. My mother having just adorned a very small frock with a very smart braid, is holding it out at arm's length, the more to admire the effect. Blanche, though leaning both hands on my mother's shoulder, is not regarding the frock, but glances towards PISISTRATUS, who, seated near the fire, leaning back in the chair, and his head bent over his breast, seems in a very bad humour. Uncle Roland, who has become a great novel-reader, is deep in the mysteries of some fascinating Third Volume. Mr. Squills has brought the "Times" in his pocket for his own special profit and delectation, and is now bending his brows over "the state of the money market," in great doubt whether railway shares can possibly fall lower,—for Mr. Squills, happy man! has large savings, and does not know what to do with his money, or, to use his own phrase, "how to buy in at the cheapest in order to sell out at the dearest."

MR. CAXTON (musingly).—"It must have been a monstrous long journey. It would be somewhere hereabouts, I take it, that they would split off."

MY MOTHER (mechanically, and in order to show Austin that she paid him the compliment of attending to his remarks).—"Who split off, my dear?"

"Bless me, Kitty," said my father, in great admiration, "you ask just the question which it is most difficult to answer. An ingenious speculator on races contends that the Danes, whose descendants make the chief part of our northern population (and indeed, if his hypothesis could be correct, we must suppose all the ancient worshippers of Odin), are of the same origin as the Etrurians. And why, Kitty,—I just ask you, why?"

My mother shook her head thoughtfully, and turned the frock to the other side of the light.

"Because, forsooth," cried my father, exploding,—"because the Etrurians called their gods the 'AEsar,' and the Scandinavians called theirs the 'AEsir,' or 'Aser'! And where do you think this adventurous scholar puts their cradle?"

"Cradle!" said my mother, dreamily, "it must be in the nursery."

MR. CAXTON.—"Exactly,—in the nursery of the human race, just here," and my father pointed to the globe; "bounded, you see, by the river Halys, and in that region which, taking its name from Ees, or As (a word designating light or fire), has been immemorially called Asia. Now, Kitty, from Ees, or As, our ethnological speculator would derive not only Asia, the land, but AEsar, or Aser, its primitive inhabitants.

Hence he supposes the origin of the Etrurians and the Scandinavians. But if we give him so much, we must give him more, and deduce from the same origin the Es of the Celt and the Ized of the Persian, and—what will be of more use to him, I dare say, poor man, than all the rest put together—the AEs of the Romans,—that is, the God of Copper-money—a very powerful household god he is to this day!"

My mother looked musingly at her frock, as if she were taking my father's proposition into serious consideration.

"So perhaps," resumed my father, "and not unconformably with sacred records, from one great parent horde came all those various tribes, carrying with them the name of their beloved Asia; and whether they wandered north, south, or west, exalting their own emphatic designation of 'Children of the Land of Light' into the title of gods. And to think" (added Mr. Caxton pathetically, gazing upon that speck on the globe on which his forefinger rested),—"to think how little they changed for the better when they got to the Don, or entangled their rafts amidst the icebergs of the Baltic,—so comfortably off as they were here, if they could but have stayed quiet."

"And why the deuce could not they?" asked Mr. Squills. "Pressure of population, and not enough to live upon, I suppose," said my father.

PISISTRATUS (sulkily).—"More probably they did away with the Corn Laws, sir."

"/Papae!/" quoth my father, "that throws a new light on the subject."

PISISTRATUS (full of his grievances, and not caring three straws about the origin of the Scandinavians).—"I know that if we are to lose L500 every year on a farm which we hold rent-free, and which the best judges allow to be a perfect model for the whole country, we had better make haste and turn AEsir, or Aser, or whatever you call them, and fix a settlement on the property of other nations, otherwise, I suspect, our probable settlement will be on the parish."

MR. SQUILLS (who, it must be remembered, is an enthusiastic Free-trader).
"You have only got to put more capital on the land."

PISISTRATUS.—"Well, Mr. Squills, as you think so well of that investment, put your capital on it. I promise that you shall have every shilling of profit."

MR. SQUILLS (hastily retreating behind the "Times")- "I don't think the Great Western can fall any lower, though it is hazardous; I can but venture a few hundreds—"

PISISTRATUS.—"On our land, Squills?—Thank you."

MR. SQUILLS.—"No, no,—anything but that; on the Great Western."

Pisistratus relaxes into gloom. Blanche steals up coaxingly, and gets snubbed for her pains.

A pause.

MR. CAXTON.—"There are two golden rules of life; one relates to the mind, and the other to the pockets. The first is, If our thoughts get into a low, nervous, aguish condition, we should make them change the air; the second is comprised in the proverb, 'It is good to have two strings to one's bow.'

Therefore, Pisistratus, I tell you what you must do,—Write a book!"

PISISTRATUS.—"Write a book! Against the abolition of the Corn Laws? Faith, sir, the mischief's done! It takes a much better pen than mine to write down an act of parliament."

MR. CAXTON.—"I only said, 'Write a book.' All the rest is the addition of your own headlong imagination."

PISISTRATUS (with the recollection of The Great Book rising before him).
—"Indeed, sir, I should think that that would just finish us!"

MR. CAXTON (not seeming to heed the interruption).—"A book that will sell; a book that will prop up the fall of prices; a book that will distract your mind from its dismal apprehensions, and restore your affection to your species and your hopes in the ultimate triumph of sound principles—by the sight of a favourable balance at the end of the yearly accounts. It is astonishing what a difference that little circumstance makes in our views of things in general. I remember when the bank in which Squills had incautiously left L1000 broke, one remarkably healthy year, that he became a great alarmist, and said that the country was on the verge of ruin; whereas you see now, when, thanks to a long succession of sickly seasons, he has a surplus capital to risk in the Great Western, he is firmly persuaded that England was never in so prosperous a condition."

MR. SQUILLS (rather sullenly).—"Pooh, pooh."

MR. CAXTON.—"Write a book, my son,—write a book. Need I tell you that Money or Moneta, according to Hyginus, was the mother of the Muses?
Write a book."

BLANCHE and my MOTHER (in full chorus).—"O yes, Sisty, a book! a book! you must write a book."

"I am sure," quoth my Uncle Roland, slamming down the volume he had just concluded, "he could write a devilish deal better book than this; and how I come to read such trash night after night is more than I could possibly explain to the satisfaction of any intelligent jury, if I were put into a witness-box, and examined in the mildest manner by my own counsel."

MR. CAXTON.—"You see that Roland tells us exactly what sort of a book it shall be."

PISISTRATUS.—"Trash, sir?"

MR. CAXTON.—"No,—that is, not necessarily trash; but a book of that class which, whether trash or not, people can't help reading. Novels have become a necessity of the age. You must write a novel."

PISISTRATUS (flattered, but dubious).—"A novel! But every subject on which novels can be written is preoccupied. There are novels of low life, novels of high life, military novels, naval novels, novels philosophical, novels religious, novels historical, novels descriptive of India, the Colonies, Ancient Rome, and the Egyptian Pyramids. From what bird, wild eagle, or barn-door fowl, can I

"Pluck one unwearied plume from Fancy's wing?"

MR. CAXTON (after a little thought).—"You remember the story which Trevanion (I beg his pardon,

Lord Ulswater) told us the other night? That gives you something of the romance of real life for your plot, puts you chiefly among scenes with which you are familiar, and furnishes you with characters which have been very sparingly dealt with since the time of Fielding. You can give us the country Squire, as you remember him in your youth; it is a specimen of a race worth preserving, the old idiosyncrasies of which are rapidly dying off, as the railways bring Norfolk and Yorkshire within easy reach of the manners of London. You can give us the old-fashioned Parson, as in all essentials he may yet be found—but before you had to drag him out of the great Tractarian bog; and, for the rest, I really think that while, as I am told, many popular writers are doing their best, especially in France, and perhaps a little in England, to set class against class, and pick up every stone in the kennel to shy at a gentleman with a good coat on his back, something useful might be done by a few good-humoured sketches of those innocent criminals a little better off than their neighbours, whom, however we dislike them, I take it for granted we shall have to endure, in one shape or another, as long as civilization exists; and they seem, on the whole, as good in their present shape as we are likely to get, shake the dice-box of society how we will."

PISISTRATUS.—"Very well said, sir; but this rural country gentleman life is not so new as you think. There's Washington Irving—"

MR. CAXTON.—"Charming; but rather the manners of the last century than this. You may as well cite Addison and Sir Roger de Coverley."

PISISTRATUS.—"'Tremaine' and 'De Vere.'"

MR. CAXTON.—"Nothing can be more graceful, nor more unlike what I mean. The Pales and Terminus I wish you to put up in the fields are familiar images, that you may cut out of an oak tree,—not beautiful marble statues, on porphyry pedestals, twenty feet high."

PISISTRATUS.—"Miss Austen; Mrs. Gore, in her masterpiece of 'Mrs. Armytage;' Mrs. Marsh, too; and then (for Scottish manners) Miss Ferrier!"

MR. CAXTON (growing cross).—"Oh, if you cannot treat on bucolics but what you must hear some Virgil or other cry 'Stop thief,' you deserve to be tossed by one of your own 'short-horns.'" (Still more contemptuously)—"I am sure I don't know why we spend so much money on sending our sons to school to learn Latin, when that Anachronism of yours, Mrs. Caxton, can't even construe a line and a half of Phaedrus,—Phaedrus, Mrs. Caxton, a book which is in Latin what Goody Two-Shoes is in the vernacular!"

MRS. CAXTON (alarmed and indignant).—"Fie! Austin I I am sure you can construe Phaedrus, dear!"

Pisistratus prudently preserves silence.

MR. CAXTON.—"I'll try him—"

"Sua cuique quum sit animi cogitatio
Colurque proprius."

"What does that mean?"

PISISTRATITS (smiling)—"That every man has some colouring matter within him, to give his own tinge to—"

"His own novel," interrupted my father. "/Contentus peragis!/"

During the latter part of this dialogue, Blanche had sewn together three quires of the best Bath paper, and she now placed them on a little table before me, with her own inkstand and steel pen.

My mother put her finger to her lip, and said, "Hush!" my father returned to the cradle of the AESas; Captain Roland leaned his cheek on his hand, and gazed abstractedly on the fire; Mr. Squills fell into a placid doze; and, after three sighs that would have melted a heart of stone, I rushed into—MY NOVEL.

CHAPTER II.

"There has never been occasion to use them since I've been in the parish," said Parson Dale.

"What does that prove?" quoth the squire, sharply, and looking the parson full in the face.

"Prove!" repeated Mr. Dale, with a smile of benign, yet too conscious superiority, "what does experience prove?"

"That your forefathers were great blockheads, and that their descendant is not a whit the wiser."

"Squire," replied the parson, "although that is a melancholy conclusion, yet if you mean it to apply universally, and not to the family of the Dales in particular; it is not one which my candour as a reasoner, and my humility as a mortal, will permit me to challenge."

"I defy you," said Mr. Hazeldean, triumphantly. "But to stick to the subject (which it is monstrous hard to do when one talks with a parson), I only just ask you to look yonder, and tell me on your conscience—I don't even say as a parson, but as a parishioner—whether you ever saw a more disreputable spectacle?"

While he spoke, the squire, leaning heavily on the parson's left shoulder, extended his cane in a line parallel with the right eye of that disputatious ecclesiastic, so that he might guide the organ of sight to the object he had thus unflatteringly described.

"I confess," said the parson, "that, regarded by the eye of the senses, it is a thing that in its best day had small pretensions to beauty, and is not elevated into the picturesque even by neglect and decay. But, my friend, regarded by the eye of the inner man,—of the rural philosopher and parochial legislator,—I say it is by neglect and decay that it is rendered a very pleasing feature in what I may call 'the moral topography of a parish.'"

The squire looked at the parson as if he could have beaten him; and, indeed, regarding the object in dispute not only with the eye of the outer man, but the eye of law and order, the eye of a country gentleman and a justice of the peace, the spectacle was scandalously disreputable. It was moss-grown; it was worm-eaten; it was broken right in the middle; through its four socketless eyes, neighboured by the nettle, peered the thistle,—the thistle! a forest of thistles!—and, to complete the degradation of the whole, those thistles had attracted the donkey of an itinerant tinker; and the irreverent animal was in the very act of taking his luncheon out of the eyes and jaws of—THE PARISH STOCKS.

The squire looked as if he could have beaten the parson; but as he was not without some slight command of temper, and a substitute was luckily at hand, he gulped down his resentment, and made a rush—at the donkey!

Now the donkey was hampered by a rope to its fore-feet, to the which was attached a billet of wood, called technically "a clog," so that it had no fair chance of escape from the assault its sacrilegious luncheon had justly provoked. But the ass turning round with unusual nimbleness at the first stroke of the cane, the squire caught his foot in the rope, and went head over heels among the thistles. The donkey gravely bent down, and thrice smelt or sniffed its prostrate foe; then, having convinced itself that it had nothing further to apprehend for the present, and very willing to make the best of the reprieve, according to the poetical admonition, "Gather your rosebuds while you may," it cropped a thistle in full bloom, close to the ear of the squire,—so close, indeed, that the parson thought the ear was gone; and with the more probability, inasmuch as the squire, feeling the warm breath of the creature, bellowed out with all the force of lungs accustomed to give a View-hallo!

"Bless me, is it gone?" said the parson, thrusting his person between the ass and the squire.

"Zounds and the devil!" cried the squire, rubbing himself, as he rose to his feet.

"Hush!" said the parson, gently. "What a horrible oath!"

"Horrible oath! If you had my nankeens on," said the squire, still rubbing himself, "and had fallen into a thicket of thistles, with a donkey's teeth within an inch of your ear—"

"It is not gone, then?" interrupted the parson.

"No,—that is, I think not," said the squire, dubiously; and he clapped his hand to the organ in question. "No! it is not gone!"

"Thank Heaven!" said the good clergyman, kindly. "Hum," growled the squire, who was now once more engaged in rubbing himself. "Thank Heaven indeed, when I am as full of thorns as a porcupine! I should just like to know what use thistles are in the world."

"For donkeys to eat, if you will let them, Squire," answered the parson.

"Ugh, you beast!" cried Mr. Hazeldean, all his wrath reawakened, whether by the reference to the donkey species, or his inability to reply to the parson, or perhaps by some sudden prick too sharp for humanity—especially humanity in nankeens—to endure without kicking. "Ugh, you beast!" he exclaimed, shaking his cane at the donkey, which, at the interposition of the parson, had respectfully recoiled a few paces, and now stood switching its thin tail, and trying vainly to lift one of its fore-legs—for the flies teased it.

"Poor thing!" said the parson, pityingly. "See, it has a raw place on the shoulder, and the flies have found out the sore."

"I am devilish glad to hear it," said the squire, vindictively.

"Fie, fie!"

"It is very well to say 'Fie, fie.' It was not you who fell among the thistles. What 's the man about now, I wonder?"

The parson had walked towards a chestnut-tree that stood on the village green; he broke off a bough, returned to the donkey, whisked away the flies, and then tenderly placed the broad leaves over the sore, as

a protection from the swarms. The donkey turned round its head, and looked at him with mild wonder.

"I would bet a shilling," said the parson, softly, "that this is the first act of kindness thou hast met with this many a day. And slight enough it is, Heaven knows."

With that the parson put his hand into his pocket, and drew out an apple. It was a fine large rose-cheeked apple, one of the last winter's store from the celebrated tree in the parsonage garden, and he was taking it as a present to a little boy in the village who had notably distinguished himself in the Sunday-school.

"Nay, in common justice, Lenny Fairfield should have the preference," muttered the parson. The ass pricked up one of its ears, and advanced its head timidly. "But Lenny Fairfield would be as much pleased with twopence; and what could twopence do to thee?" The ass's nose now touched the apple. "Take it, in the name of Charity," quoth the parson; "Justice is accustomed to be served last;" and the ass took the apple. "How had you the heart!" said the parson, pointing to the squire's cane.

The ass stopped munching, and looked askant at the squire. "Pooh! eat on; he'll not beat thee now."

"No," said the squire, apologetically. "But after all, he is not an ass of the parish; he is a vagrant, and he ought to be pounded. But the pound is in as bad a state as the stocks, thanks to your new-fashioned doctrines."

"New-fashioned!" cried the parson, almost indignantly, for he had a great disdain of new fashions. "They are as old as Christianity; nay, as old as Paradise, which you will observe is derived from a Greek, or rather a Persian word, and means something more than 'garden,' corresponding" (pursued the parson, rather pedantically) "with the Latin—vivarium,— namely, grove or park full of innocent dumb creatures. Depend on it, donkeys were allowed to eat thistles there."

"Very possibly," said the squire, dryly. "But Hazeldeau, though a very pretty village, is not Paradise. The stocks shall be mended to-morrow,—ay, and the pound too, and the next donkey found trespassing shall go into it, as sure as my name's Hazeldean."

"Then," said the parson, gravely, "I can only hope that the next parish may not follow your example; or that you and I may never be caught straying."

CHAPTER III.

Parson Dale and Squire Hazeldean parted company; the latter to inspect his sheep, the former to visit some of his parishioners, including Lenny Fairfield, whom the donkey had defrauded of his apple.

Lenny Fairfield was sure to be in the way, for his mother rented a few acres of grass-land from the squire, and it was now hay-time. And Leonard, commonly called Lenny, was an only son, and his mother a widow. The cottage stood apart, and somewhat remote, in one of the many nooks of the long, green village lane. And a thoroughly English cottage it was, three centuries old at least; with walls of rubble let into oak frames, and duly whitewashed every summer, a thatched roof, small panes of glass, an old doorway raised from the ground by two steps. There was about this little dwelling all the homely rustic elegance which peasant life admits of; a honeysuckle was trained over the door; a few flower-pots were placed on the window-sills; the small plot of ground in front of the house was kept with great neatness, and even taste; some large rough stones on either side the little path having been formed into a sort of rockwork, with creepers that were now in flower; and the potato-ground was screened from the eye by sweet peas and lupine. Simple elegance, all this, it is true; but how well it speaks for peasant and landlord, when you see that the peasant is fond of his home, and has some spare time and heart to bestow upon mere embellishment! Such a peasant is sure to be a bad customer to the alehouse, and a safe neighbour to the squire's preserves. All honour and praise to him, except a small tax upon both, which is due to the landlord!

Such sights were as pleasant to the parson as the most beautiful landscapes of Italy can be to the dilettante. He paused a moment at the wicket to look around him, and distended his nostrils voluptuously to inhale the smell of the sweet peas, mixed with that of the new-mown hay in the fields behind, which a slight breeze bore to him. He then moved on, carefully scraped his shoes, clean and well-polished as they were,—for Mr. Dale was rather a beau in his own clerical way,—on the scraper without the door, and lifted the latch.

Your virtuoso looks with artistical delight on the figure of some nymph painted on an Etruscan vase, engaged in pouring out the juice of the grape from her classic urn. And the parson felt as harmless, if not as elegant a pleasure, in contemplating Widow Fairfield brimming high a glittering can, which she designed for the refreshment of the thirsty haymakers.

Mrs. Fairfield was a middle-aged, tidy woman, with that alert precision of movement which seems to come from an active, orderly mind; and as she now turned her head briskly at the sound of the parson's footstep, she showed a countenance prepossessing though not handsome,—a countenance from which a pleasant, hearty smile, breaking forth at that moment, effaced some lines that, in repose, spoke "of sorrows, but of sorrows past;" and her cheek, paler than is common to the complexions even of the fair sex, when born and bred amidst a rural population, might have favoured the guess that the earlier part of her life had been spent in the languid air and "within-doors" occupations of a town.

"Never mind me," said the parson, as Mrs. Fairfield dropped her quick courtesy, and smoothed her apron; "if you are going into the hayfield, I will go with you; I have something to say to Lenny,—an excellent boy."

WIDOW.—"Well, sir, and you are kind to say it,—but so he is."

PARSON.—"He reads uncommonly well, he writes tolerably; he is the best lad in the whole school at his Catechism and in the Bible lessons; and I assure you, when I see his face at church, looking up so attentively, I fancy that I shall read my sermon all the better for such a listener!"

WIDOW (wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron).—"Deed, sir, when my poor Mark died, I never thought I could have lived on as I have done. But that boy is so kind and good, that when I look at him sitting there in dear Mark's chair, and remember how Mark loved him, and all he used to say to me about him, I feel somehow or other as if my good man smiled on me, and would rather I was not with him yet, till the lad had grown up, and did not want me any more."

PARSON (looking away, and after a pause).—"You never hear anything of the old folks at Lansmere?"

"Deed, sir, sin' poor Mark died, they han't noticed me nor the boy; but," added the widow, with all a peasant's pride, "it isn't that I wants their money; only it's hard to feel strange like to one's own father and mother!"

PARSON.—"You must excuse them. Your father, Mr. Avenel, was never quite the same man after that sad event which—but you are weeping, my friend, pardon me; your mother is a little proud; but so are you, though in another way."

WIDOW.—"I proud! Lord love ye, sir, I have not a bit o' pride in me! and that's the reason they always looked down on me."

PARSON.—"Your parents must be well off; and I shall apply to them in a year or two on behalf of Lenny, for they promised me to provide for him when he grew up, as they ought."

WIDOW (with flashing eyes).—"I am sure, sir, I hope you will do no such thing; for I would not have Lenny beholden to them as has never given him a kind word sin' he was born!"

The parson smiled gravely, and shook his head at poor Mrs. Fairfield's hasty confutation of her own self-acquittal from the charge of pride; but he saw that it was not the time or moment for effectual peace-making in the most irritable of all rancours,—namely, that nourished against one's nearest relations. He therefore dropped the subject, and said, "Well, time enough to think of Lenny's future prospects; meanwhile we are forgetting the haymakers. Come."

The widow opened the back door, which led across a little apple orchard into the fields.

PARSON.—"You have a pleasant place here; and I see that my friend Lenny should be in no want of apples. I had brought him one, but I have given it away on the road."

WIDOW.—"Oh, sir, it is not the deed,—it is the will; as I felt when the squire, God bless him! took two pounds off the rent the year he—that is, Mark—died."

PARSON.—"If Lenny continues to be such a help to you, it will not be long before the squire may put the two pounds on again."

"Yes, sir," said the widow, simply; "I hope he will."

"Silly woman!" muttered the parson. "That's not exactly what the schoolmistress would have said. You don't read nor write, Mrs. Fairfield; yet you express yourself with great propriety."

"You know Mark was a schollard, sir, like my poor, poor sister; and though I was a sad stupid girl afore I married, I tried to take after him when we came together."

CHAPTER IV.

They were now in the hayfield, and a boy of about sixteen, but, like most country lads, to appearance much younger than he was, looked up from his rake, with lively blue eyes beaming forth under a profusion of brown curly hair.

Leonard Fairfield was indeed a very handsome boy,—not so stout nor so ruddy as one would choose for the ideal of rustic beauty, nor yet so delicate in limb and keen in expression as are those children of cities, in whom the mind is cultivated at the expense of the body; but still he had the health of the country in his cheeks, and was not without the grace of the city in his compact figure and easy movements. There was in his physiognomy something interesting from its peculiar character of innocence and simplicity. You could see that he had been brought up by a woman, and much apart from familiar contact with other children; and such intelligence as was yet developed in him was not ripened by the jokes and cuffs of his coevals, but fostered by decorous lecturings from his elders, and good-little-boy maxims in good-little-boy books.

PARSON.—"Come hither, Lenny. You know the benefit of school, I see: it can teach you nothing better than to be a support to your mother."

LENNY (looking down sheepishly, and with a heightened glow over his face).—"Please, sir, that may come one of these days."

PARSON.—"That's right, Lenny. Let me see! why, you must be nearly a man. How old are you?"

Lenny looks up inquiringly at his mother.

PARSON.—"You ought to know, Lenny: speak for yourself. Hold your tongue, Mrs. Fairfield."

LENNY (twirling his hat, and in great perplexity).—"Well, and there is Flop, neighbour Dutton's old sheep-dog. He be very old now."

PARSON.—"I am not asking Flop's age, but your own."

LENNY.—"'Deed, sir, I have heard say as how Flop and I were pups together. That is, I—I—"

For the parson is laughing, and so is Mrs. Fairfield; and the haymakers, who have stood still to listen, are laughing too. And poor Lenny has quite lost his head, and looks as if he would like to cry.

PARSON (patting the curly locks, encouragingly).—"Never mind; it is not so badly answered, after all. And how old is Flop?"

LENNY.—"Why, he must be fifteen year and more.."

PARSON.—"How old, then, are you?"

LENNY (looking up, with a beam of intelligence).—"Fifteen year and more."

Widow sighs and nods her head.

"That's what we call putting two and two together," said the parson. "Or, in other words," and here he raised his eyes majestically towards the haymakers—"in other words, thanks to his love for his book, simple as he stands here, Lenny Fairfield has shown himself capable of **INDUCTIVE RATIOCINATION**."

At those words, delivered /ore rotundo/, the haymakers ceased laughing; for even in lay matters they held the parson to be an oracle, and words so long must have a great deal in them. Lenny drew up his head proudly.

"You are very fond of Flop, I suppose?"

"Deed he is," said the widow, "and of all poor dumb creatures."

"Very good. Suppose, my lad, that you had a fine apple, and that you met a friend who wanted it more than you, what would you do with it?"

"Please you, sir, I would give him half of it."

The parson's face fell. "Not the whole, Lenny?"

Lenny considered. "If he was a friend, sir, he would not like me to give him all."

"Upon my word, Master Leonard, you speak so well that I must e'en tell the truth. I brought you an apple, as a prize for good conduct in school. But I met by the way a poor donkey, and some one beat him for eating a thistle, so I thought I would make it up by giving him the apple. Ought I only to have given him the half?"

Lenny's innocent face became all smile; his interest was aroused. "And did the donkey like the apple?"

"Very much," said the parson, fumbling in his pocket; but thinking of Leonard Fairfield's years and understanding, and moreover observing, in the pride of his heart, that there were many spectators to his deed, he thought the meditated twopence not sufficient, and he generously produced a silver sixpence.

"There, my man, that will pay for the half apple which you would have kept for yourself." The parson again patted the curly locks, and after a hearty word or two with the other haymakers, and a friendly "Good-day" to Mrs. Fairfield, struck into a path that led towards his own glebe.

He had just crossed the stile, when he heard hasty but timorous feet behind him. He turned, and saw his friend Lenny.

LENNY (half-crying, and holding out the sixpence).—"Indeed, sir, I would rather not. I would have given all to the Neddy."

PARSON.—"Why, then, my man, you have a still greater right to the sixpence."

LENNY.—"No, sir; 'cause you only gave it to make up for the half apple. And if I had given the whole, as I ought to have done, why, I should have had no right to the sixpence. Please, sir, don't be offended; do take it back, will you?"

The parson hesitated. And the boy thrust the sixpence into his hand, as the ass had poked its nose there before in quest of the apple.

"I see," said Parson Dale, soliloquizing, "that if one don't give Justice the first place at the table, all the other Virtues eat up her share."

Indeed, the case was perplexing. Charity, like a forward, impudent baggage as she is, always thrusting herself in the way, and taking other people's apples to make her own little pie, had defrauded Lenny of his due; and now Susceptibility, who looks like a shy, blush-faced, awkward Virtue in her teens—but who, nevertheless, is always engaged in picking the pockets of her sisters—tried to filch from him his lawful recompense. The case was perplexing; for the parson held Susceptibility in great honour, despite her hypocritical tricks, and did not like to give her a slap in the face, which might frighten her away forever. So Mr. Dale stood irresolute, glancing from the sixpence to Lenny, and from Lenny to the sixpence.

"Buon giorno, Good-day to you," said a voice behind, in an accent slightly but unmistakably foreign, and a strange-looking figure presented itself at the stile.

Imagine a tall and exceedingly meagre man, dressed in a rusty suit of black,—the pantaloons tight at the calf and ankle, and there forming a loose gaiter over thick shoes, buckled high at the instep; an old cloak, lined with red, was thrown over one shoulder, though the day was sultry; a quaint, red, outlandish umbrella, with a carved brass handle, was thrust under one arm, though the sky was cloudless: a profusion of raven hair, in waving curls that seemed as fine as silk, escaped from the sides of a straw hat of prodigious brim; a complexion sallow and swarthy, and features which, though not without considerable beauty to the eye of the artist, were not only unlike what we fair, well-fed, neat-faced Englishmen are wont to consider comely, but exceedingly like what we are disposed to regard as awful and Satanic,—to wit, a long hooked nose, sunken cheeks, black eyes, whose piercing brilliancy took something wizard-like and mystical from the large spectacles through which they shone; a mouth round which played an ironical smile, and in which a physiognomist would have remarked singular shrewdness, and some closeness, complete the picture. Imagine this figure, grotesque, peregrinate, and to the eye of a peasant certainly diabolical; then perch it on the stile in the midst of those green English fields, and in sight of that primitive English village; there let it sit straddling, its long legs dangling down, a short German pipe emitting clouds from one corner of those sardonic lips, its dark eyes glaring through the spectacles full upon the parson, yet askant upon Lenny Fairfield. Lenny Fairfield looked exceedingly frightened.

"Upon my word, Dr. Riccabocca," said Mr. Dale, smiling, "you come in good time to solve a very nice question in casuistry;" and herewith the parson explained the case, and put the question, "Ought Lenny Fairfield to have the sixpence, or ought he not?"

"Cospetto!" said the doctor, "if the hen would but hold her tongue, nobody would know that she had laid an egg."

CHAPTER V.

"Granted," said the parson; "but what follows? The saying is good, but I don't see the application."

"A thousand pardons!" replied Dr. Riccabocca, with all the urbanity of an Italian; "but it seems to me that if you had given the sixpence to the /fanciullo/, that is, to this good little boy, without telling him the story about the donkey, you would never have put him and yourself into this awkward dilemma."

"But, my dear sir," whispered the parson, mildly, as he inclined his lips to the doctor's ear, "I should then have lost the opportunity of inculcating a moral lesson—you understand?"

Dr. Riccabocca shrugged his shoulders, restored his pipe to his mouth, and took a long whiff. It was a whiff eloquent, though cynical,—a whiff peculiar to your philosophical smoker, a whiff that implied the most absolute but the most placid incredulity as to the effect of the parson's moral lesson.

"Still you have not given us your decision," said the parson, after a pause.

The doctor withdrew the pipe. "Cospetto!" said he,—"he who scrubs the head of an ass wastes his soap."

"If you scrubbed mine fifty times over with those enigmatical proverbs of yours," said the parson, testily, "you would not make it any the wiser."

"My good sir," said the doctor, bowing low from his perch on the stile, "I never presumed to say that there were more asses than one in the story; but I thought that I could not better explain my meaning, which is simply this,—you scrubbed the ass's head, and therefore you must lose the soap. Let the /fanciullo/ have the sixpence; and a great sum it is, too, for a little boy, who may spend it all as pocketmoney!"

"There, Lenny, you hear?" said the parson, stretching out the sixpence. But Lenny retreated, and cast on the umpire a look of great aversion and disgust.

"Please, Master Dale," said he, obstinately, "I'd rather not."

"It is a matter of feeling, you see," said the parson, turning to the umpire; "and I believe the boy is right."

"If it be a matter of feeling," replied Dr. Riccabocca, "there is no more to be said on it. When Feeling comes in at the door, Reason has nothing to do but to jump out of the window."

"Go, my good boy," said the parson, pocketing the coin; "but, stop! give me your hand first. There—I understand you;—good-by!"

Lenny's eyes glistened as the parson shook him by the hand, and, not trusting himself to speak, he walked off sturdily. The parson wiped his forehead, and sat himself down on the stile beside the Italian. The view

before them was lovely, and both enjoyed it (though not equally) enough to be silent for some moments. On the other side the lane, seen between gaps in the old oaks and chestnuts that hung over the mossgrown pales of Hazeldean Park, rose gentle, verdant slopes, dotted with sheep and herds of deer. A stately avenue stretched far away to the left, and ended at the right hand within a few yards of a ha-ha that divided the park from a level sward of tableland, gay with shrubs and flower-pots, relieved by the shade of two mighty cedars. And on this platform, only seen in part, stood the squire's old-fashioned house, red-brick, with stone mullions, gable-ends, and quaint chimney-pots. On this side the road, immediately facing the two gentlemen, cottage after cottage whitely emerged from the curves in the lane, while, beyond, the ground declining gave an extensive prospect of woods and cornfields, spires and farms. Behind, from a belt of lilacs and evergreens, you caught a peep of the parsonage-house, backed by woodlands, and a little noisy rill running in front. The birds were still in the hedgerows,—only (as if from the very heart of the most distant woods), there came now and then the mellow note of the cuckoo.

"Verily," said Mr. Dale, softly, "my lot has fallen on a goodly heritage."

The Italian twitched his cloak over him, and sighed almost inaudibly. Perhaps he thought of his own Summer Land, and felt that, amidst all that fresh verdure of the North, there was no heritage for the stranger.

However, before the parson could notice the sigh or conjecture the cause, Dr. Riccabocca's thin lips took an expression almost malignant.

"Per Bacco!" said he; "in every country I observe that the rooks settle where the trees are the finest. I am sure that, when Noah first landed on Ararat, he must have found some gentleman in black already settled in the pleasantest part of the mountain, and waiting for his tenth of the cattle as they came out of the Ark."

The parson fixed his meek eyes on the philosopher, and there was in them something so deprecating rather than reproachful that Dr. Riccabocca turned away his face, and refilled his pipe. Dr. Riccabocca abhorred priests; but though Parson Dale was emphatically a parson, he seemed at that moment so little of what Dr. Riccabocca understood by a priest that the Italian's heart smote him for his irreverent jest on the cloth. Luckily at this moment there was a diversion to that untoward commencement of conversation in the appearance of no less a personage than the donkey himself—I mean the donkey who ate the apple.

CHAPTER VI.

The tinker was a stout, swarthy fellow, jovial and musical withal, for he was singing a stave as he flourished his staff, and at the end of each refrain down came the staff on the quarters of the donkey. The tinker went behind and sang, the donkey went before and was thwacked.

"Yours is a droll country," quoth Dr. Riccabocca; "in mine, it is not the ass that walks first in the procession that gets the blows."

The parson jumped from the stile, and looking over the hedge that divided the field from the road—"Gently, gently," said he; "the sound of the stick spoils the singing! Oh, Mr. Sprott, Mr. Sprott! a good man is merciful to his beast."

The donkey seemed to recognize the voice of its friend, for it stopped short, pricked one ear wistfully, and looked up. The tinker touched his hat, and looked up too. "Lord bless your reverence! he does not mind it,—he likes it. I would not hurt thee; would I, Neddy?"

The donkey shook his head and shivered; perhaps a fly had settled on the sore, which the chestnut leaves no longer protected.

"I am sure you did not mean to hurt him, Sprott," said the parson, more politely I fear than honestly,—for he had seen enough of that cross-grained thing called the human heart, even in the little world of a country parish, to know that it requires management and coaxing and flattering, to interfere successfully between a man and his own donkey,— "I am sure you did not mean to hurt him; but he has already got a sore on his shoulder as big as my hand, poor thing!"

"Lord love 'un! yes; that was done a playing with the manger the day I gave 'un oats!" said the tinker.

Dr. Riccabocca adjusted his spectacles, and surveyed the ass. The ass pricked up his other ear, and surveyed Dr. Riccabocca. In that mutual survey of physical qualifications, each being regarded according to the average symmetry of its species, it may be doubted whether the advantage was on the side of the philosopher.

The parson had a great notion of the wisdom of his friend in all matters not purely ecclesiastical.

"Say a good word for the donkey!" whispered he.

"Sir," said the doctor, addressing Mr. Sprott, with a respectful salutation, "there's a great kettle at my house—the Casino—which wants soldering: can you recommend me a tinker?"

"Why, that's all in my line," said Sprott; "and there ben't a tinker in the county that I would recommend like myself, thof I say it."

"You jest, good sir," said the doctor, smiling pleasantly. "A man who can't mend a hole in his own donkey can never demean himself by patching up my great kettle."

"Lord, sir!" said the tinker, archly, "if I had known that poor Neddy had had two sitch friends in court, I'd have seen he was a gentleman, and treated him as sitch."

"/Corpo di Bacco!/" quoth the doctor, "though that jest's not new, I think the tinker comes very well out of it."

"True; but the donkey!" said the parson; "I've a great mind to buy it."

"Permit me to tell you an anecdote in point," said Dr. Riccabocca.

"Well?" said the parson, interrogatively.

"Once on a time," pursued Riccabocca, "the Emperor Adrian, going to the public baths, saw an old soldier, who had served under him, rubbing his back against the marble wall. The emperor, who was a wise, and therefore a curious, inquisitive man, sent for the soldier, and asked him why he resorted to that sort of friction. 'Because,' answered the veteran, 'I am too poor to have slaves to rub me down.' The emperor was touched, and gave him slaves and money. The next day, when Adrian went to the baths, all the old men in the city were to be seen rubbing themselves against the marble as hard as they could. The emperor sent for them, and asked them the same question which he had put to the soldier; the cunning old rogues, of course, made the same answer. 'Friends,' said Adrian, 'since there are so many of you, you will just rub one another!' Mr. Dale, if you don't want to have all the donkeys in the county with holes in their shoulders, you had better not buy the tinker's!"

"It is the hardest thing in the world to do the least bit of good," groaned the parson, as he broke a twig off the hedge nervously, snapped it in two, and flung away the fragments: one of them hit the donkey on the nose. If the ass could have spoken Latin he would have said, "/Et tu, Brute!/" As it was, he hung down his ears, and walked on.

"Gee hup," said the tinker, and he followed the ass. Then stopping, he looked over his shoulder, and seeing that the parson's eyes were gazing mournfully on his /protege/, "Never fear, your reverence," cried the tinker, kindly, "I'll not spite 'un."

CHAPTER VII.

"Four, o'clock," cried the parson, looking at his watch; "half an hour after dinner-time, and Mrs. Dale particularly begged me to be punctual, because of the fine trout the squire sent us. Will you venture on what our homely language calls 'pot-luck,' Doctor?"

Now Riccabocca was a professed philosopher, and valued himself on his penetration into the motives of human conduct. And when the parson thus invited him to pot-luck, he smiled with a kind of lofty complacency; for Mrs. Dale enjoyed the reputation of having what her friends styled "her little tempers." And, as well-bred ladies rarely indulge "little tempers" in the presence of a third person not of the family, so Dr. Riccabocca instantly concluded that he was invited to stand between the pot and the luck! Nevertheless—as he was fond of trout, and a much more good-natured man than he ought to have been according to his principles—he accepted the hospitality; but he did so with a sly look from over his spectacles, which brought a blush into the guilty cheeks of the parson. Certainly Riccabocca had for once guessed right in his estimate of human motives.

The two walked on, crossed a little bridge that spanned the rill, and entered the parsonage lawn. Two dogs, that seemed to have sat on watch for their master, sprang towards him, barking; and the sound drew the notice of Mrs. Dale, who, with parasol in hand, sallied out from the sash window which opened on the lawn. Now, O reader! I know that, in thy secret heart, thou art chuckling over the want of knowledge in the sacred arcana of the domestic hearth betrayed by the author; thou art saying to thyself, "A pretty way to conciliate 'little tempers' indeed, to add to the offence of spoiling the fish the crime of bringing an unexpected friend to eat it. Pot-luck, quotha, when the pot 's boiled over this half hour!"

But, to thy utter shame and confusion, O reader! learn that both the author and Parson Dale knew very well what they were about.

Dr. Riccabocca was the special favourite of Mrs. Dale, and the only person in the whole county who never put her out, by dropping in. In fact, strange though it may seem at first glance, Dr. Riccabocca had that mysterious something about him, which we of his own sex can so little comprehend, but which always propitiates the other. He owed this, in part, to his own profound but hypocritical policy; for he looked upon woman as the natural enemy to man, against whom it was necessary to be always on the guard; whom it was prudent to disarm by every species of fawning servility and abject complaisance. He owed it also, in part, to the compassionate and heavenly nature of the angels whom his thoughts thus villanously traduced—for women like one whom they can pity without despising; and there was something in Signor Riccabocca's poverty, in his loneliness, in his exile, whether voluntary or compelled, that excited pity; while, despite his threadbare coat, the red umbrella, and the wild hair, he had, especially when addressing ladies, that air of gentleman and cavalier, which is or was more innate in an educated Italian, of whatever rank, than perhaps in the highest aristocracy of any other country in Europe. For, though I grant that nothing is more exquisite than the politeness of your French marquis of the old regime, nothing more frankly gracious than the cordial address of a high-bred English gentleman, nothing more kindly

prepossessing than the genial good-nature of some patriarchal German, who will condescend to forget his sixteen quarterings in the pleasure of doing you a favour,—yet these specimens of the suavity of their several nations are rare; whereas blandness and polish are common attributes with your Italian. They seem to have been immemorially handed down to him, from ancestors emulating the urbanity of Caesar, and refined by the grace of Horace.

"Dr. Riccabocca consents to dine with us," cried the parson, hastily.

"If Madame permit?" said the Italian, bowing over the hand extended to him, which, however, he forbore to take, seeing it was already full of the watch.

"I am only sorry that the trout must be quite spoiled," began Mrs. Dale, plaintively.

"It is not the trout one thinks of when one dines with Mrs. Dale," said the infamous dissimulator.

"But I see James coming to say that dinner is ready," observed the parson.

"He said that three-quarters of an hour ago, Charles dear," retorted Mrs. Dale, taking the arm of Dr. Riccabocca.

CHAPTER VIII.

While the parson and his wife are entertaining their guest, I propose to regale the reader with a small treatise /a propos/ of that "Charles dear," murmured by Mrs. Dale,—a treatise expressly written for the benefit of The Domestic Circle.

It is an old jest that there is not a word in the language that conveys so little endearment as the word "dear." But though the saying itself, like most truths, be trite and hackneyed, no little novelty remains to the search of the inquirer into the varieties of inimical import comprehended in that malign monosyllable. For instance, I submit to the experienced that the degree of hostility it betrays is in much proportioned to its collocation in the sentence. When, gliding indirectly through the rest of the period, it takes its stand at the close, as in that "Charles dear" of Mrs. Dale, it has spilled so much of its natural bitterness by the way that it assumes even a smile, "*amara lento temperet risu*." Sometimes the smile is plaintive, sometimes arch. For example:—

(Plaintive.) "I know very well that whatever I do is wrong, Charles dear."

"Nay, I am very glad you amused yourself so much without me, Charles dear."

"Not quite so loud! If you had but my poor head, Charles dear," etc.

(Arch.) "If you could spill the ink anywhere but on the best tablecloth, Charles dear!"

"But though you must always have your own way, you are not quite faultless, own, Charles dear," etc.

When the enemy stops in the middle of the sentence, its venom is naturally less exhausted. For example:—

"Really, I must say, Charles dear, that you are the most fidgety person," etc.

"And if the house bills were so high last week, Charles dear, I should just like to know whose fault it was—that's all."

"But you know, Charles dear, that you care no more for me and the children than—" etc.

But if the fatal word spring up, in its primitive freshness, at the head of the sentence, bow your head to the storm. It then assumes the majesty of "my" before it; it is generally more than simple objurgation,—it prefaces a sermon. My candour obliges me to confess that this is the mode in which the hateful monosyllable is more usually employed by the marital part of the one flesh; and has something about it of the odious assumption of the Petruchian *paterfamilias*—the head of the family—boding, not perhaps "peace and love, and quiet life," but certainly "awful rule and right supremacy." For example:—

"My dear Jane, I wish you would just put by that everlasting crochet, and listen to me for a few moments," etc. "My dear Jane, I wish you would understand me for once; don't think I am angry,—no, but I am hurt! You must consider," etc.

"My dear Jane, I don't know if it is your intention to ruin me; but I only wish you would do as all other women do who care three straws for their husband's property," etc.

"My dear Jane, I wish you to understand that I am the last person in the world to be jealous; but I'll be d—d if that puppy, Captain Prettyman," etc.

Now, few so carefully cultivate the connubial garden, as to feel much surprise at the occasional sting of a homely nettle or two; but who ever expected, before entering that garden, to find himself pricked and lacerated by an insidious exotical "dear," which he had been taught to believe only lived in a hothouse, along with myrtles and other tender and sensitive shrubs which poets appropriate to Venus? Nevertheless Parson Dale, being a patient man, and a pattern to all husbands, would have found no fault with his garden, though there had not been a single specimen of "dear,"—whether the dear /humilis/ or the dear /superba/; the dear /pallida, rubra/, or /nigra/; the dear /suavis/ or the dear /horrida/,—no, not a single "dear" in the whole horticulture of matrimony, which Mrs. Dale had not brought to perfection. But this was far from being the case; Mrs. Dale, living much in retirement, was unaware of the modern improvements, in variety of colour and sharpness of prickle, which have rewarded the persevering skill of our female florists.

CHAPTER IX.

In the cool of the evening Dr. Riccabocca walked home across the fields. Mr. and Mrs. Dale had accompanied him half-way, and as they now turned back to the parsonage, they looked behind to catch a glimpse of the tall, outlandish figure, winding slowly through the path amidst the waves of the green corn.

"Poor man!" said Mrs. Dale, feelingly; "and the button was off his wristband! What a pity he has nobody to take care of him! He seems very domestic. Don't you think, Charles, it would be a great blessing if we could get him a good wife?"

"Um," said the parson; "I doubt if he values the married state as he ought."

"What do you mean, Charles? I never saw a man more polite to ladies in my life."

"Yes, but—"

"But what? "You are always so mysterious, Charles dear."

"Mysterious! No, Carry; but if you could hear what the doctor says of the ladies sometimes."

"Ay, when you men get together, my dear. I know what that means—pretty things you say of us! But you are all alike; you know you are, love!"

"I am sure," said the parson, simply, "that I have good cause to speak well of the sex—when I think of you and my poor mother."

Mrs. Dale, who, with all her "tempers," was an excellent woman, and loved her husband with the whole of her quick little heart, was touched. She pressed his hand, and did not call him dear all the way home.

Meanwhile the Italian passed the fields, and came upon the high road about two miles from Hazeldean. On one side stood an old-fashioned solitary inn, such as English inns used to be before they became railway hotels,—square, solid, old-fashioned, looking so hospitable and comfortable, with their great signs swinging from some elm-tree in front, and the long row of stables standing a little back, with a chaise or two in the yard, and the jolly landlord talking of the crops to some stout farmer, whose rough pony halts of itself at the well-known door. Opposite this inn, on the other side of the road, stood the habitation of Dr. Riecabocca.

A few years before the date of these annals, the stage-coach on its way to London from a seaport town stopped at the inn, as was its wont, for a good hour, that its passengers might dine like Christian Englishmen—not gulp down a basin of scalding soup, like everlasting heathen Yankees, with that cursed railway-whistle shrieking like a fiend in their ears! It was the best dining-place on the whole road, for the trout in the neighbouring rill were famous, and so was the mutton which came from Hazeldean Park.

From the outside of the coach had descended two passengers, who, alone insensible to the attractions of mutton and trout, refused to dine,—two melancholy-looking foreigners, of whom one was Signor Riccabocca, much the same as we see him now, only that the black suit was less threadbare, the tall form less meagre, and he did not then wear spectacles; and the other was his servant. "They would walk about while the coach stopped." Now the Italian's eye had been caught by a mouldering, dismantled house on the other side the road, which nevertheless was well situated; half-way up a green hill, with its aspect due south, a little cascade falling down artificial rockwork, a terrace with a balustrade, and a few broken urns and statues before its Ionic portico, while on the roadside stood a board, with characters already half effaced, implying that the house was "To be let unfurnished, with or without land."

The abode that looked so cheerless, and which had so evidently hung long on hand, was the property of Squire Hazeldean. It had been built by his grandfather on the female side,—a country gentleman who had actually been in Italy (a journey rare enough to boast of in those days), and who, on his return home, had attempted a miniature imitation of an Italian villa. He left an only daughter and sole heiress, who married Squire Hazeldean's father; and since that time, the house, abandoned by its proprietors for the larger residence of the Hazeldeans, had been uninhabited and neglected. Several tenants, indeed, had offered themselves; but your true country squire is slow in admitting upon his own property a rival neighbour. Some wanted shooting. "That," said the Hazeldeans, who were great sportsmen and strict preservers, "was quite out of the question." Others were fine folks from London. "London servants," said the Hazeldeans, who were moral and prudent people, "would corrupt their own, and bring London prices." Others, again, were retired manufacturers, at whom the Hazeldeans turned up their agricultural noses. In short, some were too grand, and others too vulgar. Some were refused because they were known so well: "Friends were best at a distance," said the Hazeldeans; others because they were not known at all: "No good comes of strangers," said the Hazeldeans. And finally, as the house fell more and more into decay, no one would take it unless it was put into thorough repair: "As if one was made of money!" said the Hazeldeans. In short, there stood the house unoccupied and ruinous; and there, on its terrace, stood the two forlorn Italians, surveying it with a smile at each other, as for the first time since they set foot in England, they recognized, in dilapidated pilasters and broken statues, in a weed-grown terrace and the remains of an orangery, something that reminded them of the land they had left behind.

On returning to the inn, Dr. Riccabocca took the occasion to learn from the innkeeper (who was indeed a tenant of the squire) such particulars as he could collect; and a few days afterwards Mr. Hazeldean received a letter from a solicitor of repute in London, stating that a very respectable foreign gentleman had commissioned him to treat for Clump Lodge, otherwise called the "Casino;" that the said gentleman did not shoot, lived in great seclusion, and, having no family, did not care about the repairs of the place, provided only it were made weather-proof,—if the omission of more expensive reparations could render the rent suitable to his finances, which were very limited. The offer came at a fortunate moment, when the steward had just been representing to the squire the necessity of doing something to keep the Casino from falling into positive ruin, and the squire was cursing the fates which had put the Casino into an entail—so that he could not pull it down for the building materials. Mr. Hazeldean therefore caught at the proposal even as a fair lady, who has refused the best offers in the kingdom, catches, at last, at some battered old captain on half-pay, and replied that, as for rent, if the solicitor's client was a quiet, respectable man, he did not care for that, but that the gentleman might have it for the first year rent-free, on condition of paying the taxes, and putting the place a little in order. If they suited each other, they could then come to terms. Ten days subsequently to this gracious reply, Signor Riccabocca and his servant arrived; and, before the year's end, the squire was so contented with his tenant that he gave him a running lease of seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, at a rent merely nominal, on condition that Signor Riccabocca would put and

maintain the place in repair, barring the roof and fences, which the squire generously renewed at his own expense. It was astonishing, by little and little, what a pretty place the Italian had made of it, and, what is more astonishing, how little it had cost him. He had, indeed, painted the walls of the hall, staircase, and the rooms appropriated to himself, with his own hands. His servant had done the greater part of the upholstery. The two between them had got the garden into order.

The Italians seemed to have taken a joint love to the place, and to deck it as they would have done some favourite chapel to their Madonna.

It was long before the natives reconciled themselves to the odd ways of the foreign settlers. The first thing that offended them was the exceeding smallness of the household bills. Three days out of the seven, indeed, both man and master dined on nothing else but the vegetables in the garden, and the fishes in the neighbouring rill; when no trout could be caught they fried the minnows (and certainly, even in the best streams, minnows are more frequently caught than trout). The next thing which angered the natives quite as much, especially the female part of the neighbourhood, was the very sparing employment the two creatures gave to the sex usually deemed so indispensable in household matters. At first, indeed, they had no woman-servant at all. But this created such horror that Parson Dale ventured a hint upon the matter, which Riccabocca took in very good part; and an old woman was forthwith engaged after some bargaining—at three shillings a week—to wash and scrub as much as she liked during the daytime. She always returned to her own cottage to sleep. The man-servant, who was styled in the neighbourhood "Jackeymo," did all else for his master,—smoothed his room, dusted his papers, prepared his coffee, cooked his dinner, brushed his clothes, and cleaned his pipes, of which Riccabocca had a large collection. But however close a man's character, it generally creeps out in driblets; and on many little occasions the Italian had shown acts of kindness, and, on some more rare occasions, even of generosity, which had served to silence his calumniators, and by degrees he had established a very fair reputation,—suspected, it is true, of being a little inclined to the Black Art, and of a strange inclination to starve Jackeymo and himself, in other respects harmless enough.

Signor Riccabocca had become very intimate, as we have seen, at the Parsonage. But not so at the Hall. For though the squire was inclined to be very friendly to all his neighbours, he was, like most country gentlemen, rather easily /huffed/. Riccabocca had, with great politeness, still with great obstinacy, refused Mr. Hazeldean's earlier invitations to dinner; and when the squire found that the Italian rarely declined to dine at the Parsonage, he was offended in one of his weak points,—namely, his pride in the hospitality of Hazeldean Hall,—and he ceased altogether invitations so churlishly rejected. Nevertheless, as it was impossible for the squire, however huffed, to bear malice, he now and then reminded Riccabocca of his existence by presents of game, and would have called on him more often than he did, but that Riccabocca received him with such excessive politeness that the blunt country gentleman felt shy and put out, and used to say that "to call on Rickeybockey was as bad as going to Court."

But we have left Dr. Riccabocca on the high road. By this time he has ascended a narrow path that winds by the side of the cascade, he has passed a trellis-work covered with vines, from which Jackeymo has positively succeeded in making what he calls wine,—a liquid, indeed, that if the cholera had been popularly known in those days, would have soured the mildest member of the Board of Health; for Squire Hazeldean, though a robust man who daily carried off his bottle of port with impunity, having once rashly tasted it, did not recover the effect till he had had a bill from the apothecary as long as his own arm. Passing this trellis, Dr. Riccabocca entered upon the terrace, with its stone pavement as smoothed and trimmed as hands could make it. Here, on neat stands, all his favourite flowers were arranged; here four

orange trees were in full blossom; here a kind of summer-house, or belvidere, built by Jackeymo and himself, made his chosen morning room from May till October; and from this belvidere there was as beautiful an expanse of prospect as if our English Nature had hospitably spread on her green board all that she had to offer as a banquet to the exile.

A man without his coat, which was thrown over the balustrade, was employed in watering the flowers,—a man with movements so mechanical, with a face so rigidly grave in its tawny hues, that he seemed like an automaton made out of mahogany.

"Giacomo," said Dr. Riccabocca, softly.

The automaton stopped its hand, and turned its head.

"Put by the watering-pot, and come hither," continued Riccabocca, in Italian; and, moving towards the balustrade, he leaned over it. Mr. Mitford, the historian, calls Jean Jacques "John James." Following that illustrious example, Giacomo shall be Anglified into Jackeymo. Jackeymo came to the balustrade also, and stood a little behind his master. "Friend," said Riccabocca, "enterprises have not always succeeded with us. Don't you think, after all, it is tempting our evil star to rent those fields from the landlord?" Jackeymo crossed himself, and made some strange movement with a little coral charm which he wore set in a ring on his finger.

"If the Madonna send us luck, and we could hire a lad cheap?" said Jackeymo, doubtfully.

"Piu vale un presente che dui futuri,"—"["A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."]"—said Riccabocca.

"Chi non fa quando pub, non pub, fare quando vuole,"—"["He who will not when he may, when he wills it shall have nay."]"—answered Jackeymo, as sententiously as his master. "And the Padrone should think in time that he must lay by for the dower of the poor signorina."

Riccabocca sighed, and made no reply.

"She must be that high now!" said Jackeymo, putting his hand on some imaginary line a little above the balustrade. Riccabocca's eyes, raised over the spectacles, followed the hand.

"If the Padrone could but see her here—"

"I thought I did," muttered the Italian.

"He would never let her go from his side till she went to a husband's," continued Jackeymo.

"But this climate,—she could never stand it," said Riccabocca, drawing his cloak round him, as a north wind took him in the rear.

"The orange trees blossom even here with care," said Jackeymo, turning back to draw down an awning where the orange trees faced the north. "See!" he added, as he returned with a sprig in full bud.

Dr. Riccabocca bent over the blossom, and then placed it in his bosom.

"The other one should be there too," said Jackeymo.

"To die—as this does already!" answered Riccabocca. "Say no more."

Jackeymo shrugged his shoulders; and then, glancing at his master, drew his hand over his eyes.

There was a pause. Jackeymo was the first to break it. "But, whether here or there, beauty without money is the orange tree without shelter. If a lad could be got cheap, I would hire the land, and trust for the crop to the Madonna."

"I think I know of such a lad," said Riccabocca, recovering himself, and with his sardonic smile once more lurking about the corners of his mouth,— "a lad made for us."

"/Diavolo!/"

"No, not the Diavolo! Friend, I have this day seen a boy who—refused sixpence!"

"/Cosa stupenda!/" exclaimed Jackeymo, opening his eyes, and letting fall the watering-pot.

"It is true, my friend."

"Take him, Padrone, in Heaven's name, and the fields will grow gold."

"I will think of it, for it must require management to catch such a boy," said Riccabocca. "Meanwhile, light a candle in the parlour, and bring from my bedroom that great folio of Machiavelli."

CHAPTER X.

In my next chapter I shall present Squire Hazeldean in patriarchal state,—not exactly under the fig-tree he has planted, but before the stocks he has reconstructed,—Squire Hazeldean and his family on the village green! The canvas is all ready for the colours.

But in this chapter I must so far afford a glimpse into antecedents as to let the reader know that there is one member of the family whom he is not likely to meet at present, if ever, on the village green at Hazeldean.

Our squire lost his father two years after his birth; his mother was very handsome—and so was her jointure; she married again at the expiration of her year of mourning; the object of her second choice was Colonel Egerton.

In every generation of Englishmen (at least since the lively reign of Charles II.) there are a few whom some elegant Genius skims off from the milk of human nature, and reserves for the cream of society. Colonel Egerton was one of these */terque quaterque beati/*, and dwelt apart on a top shelf in that delicate porcelain dish—not bestowed upon vulgar buttermilk—which persons of fashion call The Great World. Mighty was the marvel of Pall Mall, and profound was the pity of Park Lane, when this supereminent personage condescended to lower himself into a husband. But Colonel Egerton was not a mere gaudy butterfly; he had the provident instincts ascribed to the bee. Youth had passed from him, and carried off much solid property in its flight; he saw that a time was fast coming when a home, with a partner who could help to maintain it, would be conducive to his comforts, and an occasional hum-drum evening by the fireside beneficial to his health. In the midst of one season at Brighton, to which gay place he had accompanied the Prince of Wales, he saw a widow, who, though in the weeds of mourning, did not appear inconsolable. Her person pleased his taste; the accounts of her jointure satisfied his understanding; he contrived an introduction, and brought a brief wooing to a happy close. The late Mr. Hazeldean had so far anticipated the chance of the young widow's second espousals, that, in case of that event, he transferred, by his testamentary dispositions, the guardianship of his infant heir from the mother to two squires whom he had named his executors. This circumstance combined with her new ties somewhat to alienate Mrs. Hazeldean from the pledge of her former loves; and when she had borne a son to Colonel Egerton, it was upon that child that her maternal affections gradually concentrated.

William Hazeldean was sent by his guardians to a large provincial academy, at which his forefathers had received their education time out of mind. At first he spent his holidays with Mrs. Egerton; but as she now resided either in London, or followed her lord to Brighton, to partake of the gayeties at the Pavilion, so as he grew older, William, who had a hearty affection for country life, and of whose bluff manners and rural breeding Mrs. Egerton (having grown exceedingly refined) was openly ashamed, asked and obtained permission to spend his vacations either with his guardians or at the old Hall. He went late to a small college at Cambridge, endowed in the fifteenth century by some ancestral Hazeldean; and left it, on coming of age, without taking a degree. A few years afterwards he married a young lady, country born and

bred like himself.

Meanwhile his half-brother, Audley Egerton, may be said to have begun his initiation into the /beau monde/ before he had well cast aside his coral and bells; he had been fondled in the lap of duchesses, and had galloped across the room astride on the canes of ambassadors and princes. For Colonel Egerton was not only very highly connected, not only one of the /Dii majores/ of fashion, but he had the still rarer good fortune to be an exceedingly popular man with all who knew him,—so popular, that even the fine ladies whom he had adored and abandoned forgave him for marrying out of "the set," and continued to be as friendly as if he had not married at all. People who were commonly called heartless were never weary of doing kind things to the Egertons. When the time came for Audley to leave the preparatory school at which his infancy budded forth amongst the stateliest of the little lilies of the field, and go to Eton, half the fifth and sixth forms had been canvassed to be exceedingly civil to young Egerton. The boy soon showed that he inherited his father's talent for acquiring popularity, and that to this talent he added those which put popularity to use. Without achieving any scholastic distinction, he yet contrived to establish at Eton the most desirable reputation which a boy can obtain,—namely, that among his own contemporaries, the reputation of a boy who was sure to do something when he grew to be a man. As a gentleman-commoner at Christ Church, Oxford, he continued to sustain this high expectation, though he won no prizes, and took but an ordinary degree; and at Oxford the future "something" became more defined,—it was "something in public life" that this young man was to do.

While he was yet at the University, both his parents died, within a few months of each other. And when Audley Egerton came of age, he succeeded to a paternal property which was supposed to be large, and indeed had once been so; but Colonel Egerton had been too lavish a man to enrich his heir, and about L1500 a year was all that sales and mortgages left of an estate that had formerly approached a rental of L10,000.

Still, Audley was considered to be opulent; and he did not dispel that favourable notion by any imprudent exhibition of parsimony. On entering the world of London, the Clubs flew open to receive him, and he woke one morning to find himself, not indeed famous—but the fashion. To this fashion he at once gave a certain gravity and value, he associated as much as possible with public men and political ladies, he succeeded in confirming the notion that he was "born to ruin or to rule the State."

The dearest and most intimate friend of Audley Egerton was Lord L'Estrange, from whom he had been inseparable at Eton, and who now, if Audley Egerton was the fashion, was absolutely the rage in London.

Harley, Lord L'Estrange, was the only son of the Earl of Lansmere, a nobleman of considerable wealth, and allied, by intermarriages, to the loftiest and most powerful families in England. Lord Lansmere, nevertheless, was but little known in the circles of London. He lived chiefly on his estates, occupying himself with the various duties of a great proprietor, and when he came to the metropolis, it was rather to save than to spend; so that he could afford to give his son a very ample allowance, when Harley, at the age of sixteen (having already attained to the sixth form at Eton), left school for one of the regiments of the Guards.

Few knew what to make of Harley L'Estrange,—and that was, perhaps, the reason why he was so much thought of. He had been by far the most brilliant boy of his time at Eton,—not only the boast of the cricket-ground, but the marvel of the schoolroom; yet so full of whims and oddities, and seeming to achieve his triumphs with so little aid from steadfast application, that he had not left behind him the same expectations

of solid eminence which his friend and senior, Audley Egerton, had excited. His eccentricities, his quaint sayings, and out- of-the-way actions, became as notable in the great world as they had been in the small one of a public school. That he was very clever there was no doubt, and that the cleverness was of a high order might be surmised, not only from the originality but the independence of his character. He dazzled the world, without seeming to care for its praise or its censure,—dazzled it, as it were, because he could not help shining. He had some strange notions, whether political or social, which rather frightened his father. According to Southey, "A man should be no more ashamed of having been a republican than of having been young." Youth and extravagant opinions naturally go together. I don't know whether Harley L'Estrange was a republican at the age of eighteen; but there was no young man in London who seemed to care less for being heir to an illustrious name and some forty or fifty thousand pounds a year. It was a vulgar fashion in that day to play the exclusive, and cut persons who wore bad neckcloths, and called themselves Smith or Johnson. Lord L'Estrange never cut any one, and it was quite enough to slight some worthy man because of his neckcloth or his birth to insure to the offender the pointed civilities of this eccentric successor to the Belforts and the Wildairs.

It was the wish of his father that Harley, as soon as he came of age, should represent the borough of Lonsmere (which said borough was the single plague of the earl's life). But this wish was never realized. Suddenly, when the young idol of London still wanted some two or three years of his majority, a new whim appeared to seize him. He withdrew entirely from society; he left unanswered the most pressing three- cornered notes of inquiry and invitation that ever strewed the table of a young Guardsman; he was rarely seen anywhere in his former haunts,—when seen, was either alone or with Egerton; and his gay spirits seemed wholly to have left him. A profound melancholy was written in his countenance, and breathed in the listless tones of his voice. About this time a vacancy happening to occur for the representation of Lonsmere, Harley made it his special request to his father that the family interest might be given to Audley Egerton,—a request which was backed by all the influence of his lady mother, who shared in the esteem which her son felt for his friend. The earl yielded; and Egerton, accompanied by Harley, went down to Lonsmere Park, which adjoined the borough, in order to be introduced to the electors. This visit made a notable epoch in the history of many personages who figure in my narrative; but at present I content myself with saying that circumstances arose which, just as the canvass for the new election commenced, caused both L'Estrange and Audley to absent themselves from the scene of action, and that the last even wrote to Lord Lonsmere expressing his intention of declining to contest the borough.

Fortunately for the parliamentary career of Audley Egerton, the election had become to Lord Lonsmere not only a matter of public importance, but of personal feeling. He resolved that the battle should be fought out, even in the absence of the candidate, and at his own expense. Hitherto the contest for this distinguished borough had been, to use the language of Lord Lonsmere, "conducted in the spirit of gentlemen,"—that is to say, the only opponents to the Lonsmere interest had been found in one or the other of the two rival families in the same county; and as the earl was a hospitable, courteous man, much respected and liked by the neighbouring gentry, so the hostile candidate had always interlarded his speeches with profuse compliments to his Lordship's high character, and civil expressions as to his Lordship's candidate. But, thanks to successive elections, one of these two families had come to an end, and its actual representative was now residing within the Rules of the Bench; the head of the other family was the sitting member, and, by an amicable agreement with the Lonsmere interest, he remained as neutral as it is in the power of any sitting member to be amidst the passions of an intractable committee. Accordingly it had been hoped that Egerton would come in without opposition, when, the very day on which he had abruptly left the place, a handbill, signed "Haverill Dashmore, Captain R. N., Baker Street, Portman Square," announced, in very spirited language, the intention of that gentleman "to emancipate the

borough from the unconstitutional domination of an oligarchical faction, not with a view to his own political aggrandizement,—indeed at great personal inconvenience,—but actuated solely by abhorrence to tyranny, and patriotic passion for the purity of election."

This announcement was followed, within two hours, by the arrival of Captain Dashmore himself, in a carriage and four, covered with yellow favours, and filled, inside and out, with harumscarum-looking friends, who had come down with him to share the canvass and partake the fun.

Captain Dashmore was a thorough sailor, who had, however, conceived a disgust to the profession from the date in which a minister's nephew had been appointed to the command of a ship to which the captain considered himself unquestionably entitled. It is just to the minister to add that Captain Dashmore had shown as little regard for orders from a distance as had immortalized Nelson himself; but then the disobedience had not achieved the same redeeming success as that of Nelson, and Captain Dashmore ought to have thought himself fortunate in escaping a severer treatment than the loss of promotion. But no man knows when he is well off; and retiring on half pay, just as he came into unexpected possession of some forty or fifty thousand pounds, bequeathed by a distant relation, Captain Dashmore was seized with a vindictive desire to enter parliament, and inflict oratorical chastisement on the Administration.

A very few hours sufficed to show the sea-captain to be a most capital electioneerer for a popular but not enlightened constituency. It is true that he talked the saddest nonsense ever heard from an open window; but then his jokes were so broad, his manner so hearty, his voice so big, that in those dark days, before the schoolmaster was abroad, he would have beaten your philosophical Radical and moralizing Democrat hollow. Moreover, he kissed all the women, old and young, with the zest of a sailor who has known what it is to be three years at sea without sight of a beardless lip; he threw open all the public-houses, asked a numerous committee every day to dinner, and, chucking his purse up in the air, declared "he would stick to his guns while there was a shot in the locker." Till then, there had been but little political difference between the candidate supported by Lord Lansmere's interest and the opposing parties; for country gentlemen, in those days, were pretty much of the same way of thinking, and the question had been really local,—namely, whether the Lansmere interest should or should not prevail over that of the two squire-archival families who had alone, hitherto, ventured to oppose it. But though Captain Dashmore was really a very loyal man, and much too old a sailor to think that the State (which, according to established metaphor, is a vessel par excellence) should admit Jack upon quarterdeck, yet, what with talking against lords and aristocracy, jobs and abuses, and searching through no very refined vocabulary for the strongest epithets to apply to those irritating nouns—substantive, his bile had got the better of his understanding, and he became fuddled, as it were, by his own eloquence. Thus, though as innocent of Jacobinical designs as he was incapable of setting the Thames on fire, you would have guessed him, by his speeches, to be one of the most determined incendiaries that ever applied a match to the combustible materials of a contested election; while, being by no means accustomed to respect his adversaries, he could not have treated the Earl of Lansmere with less ceremony if his Lordship had been a Frenchman. He usually designated that respectable nobleman, who was still in the prime of life, by the title of "Old Pompous;" and the mayor, who was never seen abroad but in top-boots, and the solicitor, who was of a large build, received from his irreverent wit the joint sobriquet of "Tops and Bottoms"! Hence the election had now become, as I said before, a personal matter with my Lord, and, indeed, with the great heads of the Lansmere interest. The earl seemed to consider his very coronet at stake in the question. "The Man from Baker Street," with his preternatural audacity, appeared to him a being ominous and awful—not so much to be regarded with resentment as with superstitious terror. He felt as felt the dignified Montezuma, when that ruffianly Cortez, with his handful of Spanish rascallions, bearded him in his own capital, and in the midst of his Mexican

splendour. The gods were menaced if man could be so insolent! wherefore, said my Lord tremulously, "The Constitution is gone if the Man from Baker Street comes in for Lansmere!"

But in the absence of Audley Egerton, the election looked extremely ugly, and Captain Dashmore gained ground hourly, when the Lansmere solicitor happily bethought him of a notable proxy for the missing candidate. The Squire of Hazeldean, with his young wife, had been invited by the earl in honour of Audley; and in the squire the solicitor beheld the only mortal who could cope with the sea-captain,—a man with a voice as burly and a face as bold; a man who, if permitted for the nonce by Mrs. Hazeldean, would kiss all the women no less heartily than the captain kissed them; and who was, moreover, a taller and a handsomer and a younger man,—all three great recommendations in the kissing department of a contested election. Yes, to canvass the borough, and to speak from the window, Squire Hazeldean would be even more popularly presentable than the London-bred and accomplished Audley Egerton himself.

The squire, applied to and urged on all sides, at first said bluntly that he would do anything in reason to serve his brother, but that he did not like, for his own part, appearing, even in proxy, as a lord's nominee; and moreover, if he was to be sponsor for his brother, why, he must promise and vow, in his name, to be stanch and true to the land they lived by! And how could he tell that Audley, when once he got into the House, would not forget the land, and then he, William Hazeldean, would be made a liar, and look like a turncoat!

But these scruples being overruled by the arguments of the gentlemen and the entreaties of the ladies, who took in the election that intense interest which those gentle creatures usually do take in all matters of strife and contest, the squire at length consented to confront the Man from Baker Street, and went accordingly into the thing with that good heart and old English spirit with which he went into everything whereon he had once made up his mind.

The expectations formed of the squire's capacities for popular electioneering were fully realized. He talked quite as much nonsense as Captain Dashmore on every subject except the landed interest; there he was great, for he knew the subject well,—knew it by the instinct that comes with practice, and compared to which all your showy theories are mere cobwebs and moonshine.

The agricultural outvoters—many of whom, not living under Lord Lansmere, but being small yeomen, had hitherto prided themselves on their independence, and gone against my Lord—could not in their hearts go against one who was every inch the farmer's friend. They began to share in the earl's personal interest against the Man from Baker Street; and big fellows, with legs bigger round than Captain Dashmore's tight little body, and huge whips in their hands, were soon seen entering the shops, "intimidating the electors," as Captain Dashmore indignantly declared.

These new recruits made a great difference in the musterroll of the Lansmere books; and when the day for polling arrived, the result was a fair question for even betting. At the last hour, after a neck-and-neck contest, Mr. Audley Egerton beat the captain by two votes; and the names of these voters were John Avenel, resident freeman, and his son-in-law, Mark Fairfield, an outvoter, who, though a Lansmere freeman, had settled in Hazeldean, where he had obtained the situation of head carpenter on the squire's estate.

These votes were unexpected; for though Mark Fairfield had come to Lansmere on purpose to support the squire's brother, and though the Avenels had been always stanch supporters of the Lansmere Blue interest, yet a severe affliction (as to the nature of which, not desiring to sadden the opening of my story, I am

considerately silent) had befallen both these persons, and they had left the town on the very day after Lord L'Estrange and Mr. Egerton had quitted Lansmere Park.

Whatever might have been the gratification of the squire, as a canvasser and a brother, at Mr. Egerton's triumph, it was much damped when, on leaving the dinner given in honour of the victory at the Lansmere Arms, and about, with no steady step, to enter a carriage which was to convey him to his Lordship's house, a letter was put into his hands by one of the gentlemen who had accompanied the captain to the scene of action; and the perusal of that letter, and a few whispered words from the bearer thereof, sent the squire back to Mrs. Hazeldean a much soberer man than she had ventured to hope for. The fact was, that on the day of nomination, the captain having honoured Mr. Hazeldean with many poetical and figurative appellations,—such as "Prize Ox," "Tony Lumpkin," "Blood-sucking Vampire," and "Brotherly Warming-Pan,"—the squire had retorted by a joke about "Saltwater Jack;" and the captain, who like all satirists was extremely susceptible and thin-skinned, could not consent to be called "Salt-water Jack" by a "Prize Ox" and a "Bloodsucking Vampire."

The letter, therefore, now conveyed to Mr. Hazeldean by a gentleman, who, being from the Sister Country, was deemed the most fitting accomplice in the honourable destruction of a brother mortal, contained nothing more nor less than an invitation to single combat; and the bearer thereof, with the suave politeness enjoined by etiquette on such well-bred homicidal occasions, suggested the expediency of appointing the place of meeting in the neighbourhood of London, in order to prevent interference from the suspicious authorities of Lansmere.

The natives of some countries—the warlike French in particular—think little of that formal operation which goes by the name of DUELLING. Indeed, they seem rather to like it than otherwise. But there is nothing your thorough-paced Englishman—a Hazeldean of Hazeldean—considers with more repugnance and aversion than that same cold-blooded ceremonial. It is not within the range of an Englishman's ordinary habits of thinking. He prefers going to law,—a much more destructive proceeding of the two. Nevertheless, if an Englishman must fight, why, he will fight. He says "It is very foolish;" he is sure "it is most unchristianlike;" he agrees with all that Philosophy, Preacher, and Press have laid down on the subject; but he makes his will, says his prayers, and goes out—like a heathen.

It never, therefore, occurred to the squire to show the white feather upon this unpleasant occasion. The next day, feigning excuse to attend the sale of a hunting stud at Tattersall's, he ruefully went up to London, after taking a peculiarly affectionate leave of his wife. Indeed, the squire felt convinced that he should never return home except in a coffin. "It stands to reason," said he to himself, "that a man who has been actually paid by the King's Government for shooting people ever since he was a little boy in a midshipman's jacket, must be a dead hand at the job. I should not mind if it was with double-barrelled Mantons and small shot; but ball and pistol, they are n't human nor sportsmanlike!" However, the squire, after settling his worldly affairs, and hunting up an old college friend who undertook to be his second, proceeded to a sequestered corner of Wimbledon Common, and planted himself, not sideways, as one ought to do in such encounters (the which posture the squire swore was an unmanly way of shirking), but full front to the mouth of his adversary's pistol, with such sturdy composure that Captain Dashmore, who, though an excellent shot, was at bottom as good-natured a fellow as ever lived, testified his admiration by letting off his gallant opponent with a ball in the fleshy part of the shoulder, after which he declared himself perfectly satisfied. The parties then shook hands, mutual apologies were exchanged, and the squire, much to his astonishment to find himself still alive, was conveyed to Limmer's Hotel, where, after a considerable amount of anguish, the ball was extracted and the wound healed. Now it was all over, the

squire felt very much raised in his own conceit; and when he was in a humour more than ordinarily fierce, that perilous event became a favourite allusion with him.

He considered, moreover, that his brother had incurred at his hand the most lasting obligations; and that, having procured Audley's return to parliament, and defended his interests at risk of his own life, he had an absolute right to dictate to that gentleman how to vote,—upon all matters, at least, connected with the landed interest. And when, not very long after Audley took his seat in parliament (which he did not do for some months), he thought proper both to vote and to speak in a manner wholly belying the promises the squire had made on his behalf, Mr. Hazeldean wrote him such a trimmer that it could not but produce an unconciliatory reply. Shortly afterwards the squire's exasperation reached the culminating point; for, having to pass through Lansmere on a market-day, he was hooted by the very farmers whom he had induced to vote for his brother; and, justly imputing the disgrace to Audley, he never heard the name of that traitor to the land mentioned without a heightened colour and an indignant expletive. M. de Ruqueville—who was the greatest wit of his day—had, like the squire, a half-brother, with whom he was not on the best of terms, and of whom he always spoke as his "frere de loin!" Audley Egerton was thus Squire Hazeldean's "distant- brother"!

Enough of these explanatory antecedents,—let us return to the stocks.

CHAPTER XI.

The squire's carpenters were taken from the park pales and set to work at the parish stocks. Then came the painter and coloured them a beautiful dark blue, with white border—and a white rim round the holes—with an ornamental flourish in the middle. It was the gayest public edifice in the whole village, though the village possessed no less than three other monuments of the Vitruvian genius of the Hazeldeans,—to wit, the almshouse, the school, and the parish pump.

A more elegant, enticing, coquettish pair of stocks never gladdened the eye of a justice of the peace.

And Squire Hazeldean's eye was gladdened. In the pride of his heart he brought all the family down to look at the stocks. The squire's family (omitting the */frere de loin/*) consisted of Mrs. Hazeldean, his wife; next, of Miss Jemima Hazeldean, his first cousin; thirdly, of Mr. Francis Hazeldean, his only son; and fourthly, of Captain Barnabas Higginbotham, a distant relation,—who, indeed, strictly speaking, was not of the family, but only a visitor ten months in the year. Mrs. Hazeldean was every inch the lady,—the lady of the parish. In her comely, florid, and somewhat sunburned countenance, there was an equal expression of majesty and benevolence; she had a blue eye that invited liking, and an aquiline nose that commanded respect. Mrs. Hazeldean had no affectation of fine airs, no wish to be greater and handsomer and cleverer than she was. She knew herself, and her station, and thanked Heaven for it. There was about her speech and manner something of the shortness and bluntness which often characterizes royalty; and if the lady of a parish is not a queen in her own circle, it is never the fault of a parish. Mrs. Hazeldean dressed her part to perfection. She wore silks that seemed heirlooms,—so thick were they, so substantial and imposing; and over these, when she was in her own domain, the whitest of aprons; while at her waist was seen no fiddle-faddle */chatelaine/*, with */breloques/* and trumpery, but a good honest gold watch to mark the time, and a long pair of scissors to cut off the dead leaves from her flowers,—for she was a great horticulturalist. When occasion needed, Mrs. Hazeldean could, however, lay by her more sumptuous and imperial raiment for a stout riding-habit, of blue Saxony, and canter by her husband's side to see the hounds throw off. Nay, on the days on which Mr. Hazeldean drove his famous fast-trotting cob to the market town, it was rarely that you did not see his wife on the left side of the gig. She cared as little as her lord did for wind and weather, and in the midst of some pelting shower her pleasant face peeped over the collar and capes of a stout dreadnought, expanding into smiles and bloom as some frank rose, that opens from its petals, and rejoices in the dews. It was easy to see that the worthy couple had married for love; they were as little apart as they could help it. And still, on the first of September, if the house was not full of company which demanded her cares, Mrs. Hazeldean "stepped out" over the stubbles by her husband's side, with as light a tread and as blithe an eye as when, in the first bridal year, she had enchanted the squire by her genial sympathy with his sports.

So there now stands Harriet Hazeldean, one hand leaning on the squire's broad shoulder, the other thrust into her apron, and trying her best to share her husband's enthusiasm for his own public-spirited patriotism, in the renovation of the parish stocks. A little behind, with two fingers resting on the thin arm of Captain Barnabas, stood Miss Jemima, the orphan daughter of the squire's uncle, by a runaway

imprudent marriage with a young lady who belonged to a family which had been at war with the Hazeldeans since the reign of Charles the First respecting a right of way to a small wood (or rather spring) of about an acre, through a piece of furze land, which was let to a brickmaker at twelve shillings a year. The wood belonged to the Hazeldeans, the furze land to the Sticktorights (an old Saxon family, if ever there was one). Every twelfth year, when the fagots and timber were felled, this feud broke out afresh; for the Sticktorights refused to the Hazeldeans the right to cart off the said fagots and timber through the only way by which a cart could possibly pass. It is just to the Hazeldeans to say that they had offered to buy the land at ten times its value. But the Sticktorights, with equal magnanimity, had declared that they would not "alienate the family property for the convenience of the best squire that ever stood upon shoe leather." Therefore, every twelfth year, there was always a great breach of the peace on the part of both Hazeldeans and Sticktorights, magistrates and deputy-lieutenants though they were. The question was fairly fought out by their respective dependants, and followed by various actions for assault and trespass. As the legal question of right was extremely obscure, it never had been properly decided; and, indeed, neither party wished it to be decided, each at heart having some doubt of the propriety of its own claim. A marriage between a younger son of the Hazeldeans and a younger daughter of the Sticktorights was viewed with equal indignation by both families; and the consequence had been that the runaway couple, unblessed and unforgiven, had scrambled through life as they could, upon the scanty pay of the husband, who was in a marching regiment, and the interest of L1000, which was the wife's fortune independent of her parents. They died and left an only daughter (upon whom the maternal L1000 had been settled), about the time that the squire came of age and into possession of his estates. And though he inherited all the ancestral hostility towards the Sticktorights, it was not in his nature to be unkind to a poor orphan, who was, after all, the child of a Hazeldean. Therefore he had educated and fostered Jemima with as much tenderness as if she had been his sister; put out her L1000 at nurse, and devoted, from the ready money which had accrued from the rents during his minority, as much as made her fortune (with her own accumulated at compound interest) no less than L4000, the ordinary marriage portion of the daughters of Hazeldean. On her coming of age, he transferred this sum to her absolute disposal, in order that she might feel herself independent, see a little more of the world than she could at Hazeldean, have candidates to choose from if she deigned to marry; or enough to live upon, if she chose to remain single. Miss Jemima had somewhat availed herself of this liberty, by occasional visits to Cheltenham and other watering-places. But her grateful affection to the squire was such that she could never bear to be long away from the Hall. And this was the more praise to her heart, inasmuch as she was far from taking kindly to the prospect of being an old maid; and there were so few bachelors in the neighbourhood of Hazeldean, that she could not but have that prospect before her eyes whenever she looked out of the Hall windows. Miss Jemima was indeed one of the most kindly and affectionate of beings feminine; and if she disliked the thought of single blessedness, it really was from those innocent and womanly instincts towards the tender charities of hearth and home, without which a lady, however otherwise estimable, is little better than a Minerva in bronze. But, whether or not, despite her fortune and her face, which last, though not strictly handsome, was pleasing, and would have been positively pretty if she had laughed more often (for when she laughed, there appeared three charming dimples, invisible when she was grave),—whether or not, I say, it was the fault of our insensibility or her own fastidiousness, Miss Jemima approached her thirtieth year, and was still Miss Jemima. Now, therefore, that beautifying laugh of hers was very rarely heard, and she had of late become confirmed in two opinions, not at all conducive to laughter. One was a conviction of the general and progressive wickedness of the male sex, and the other was a decided and lugubrious belief that the world was coming to an end. Miss Jemima was now accompanied by a small canine favourite, true Blenheim, with a snub nose. It was advanced in life, and somewhat obese. It sat on its haunches, with its tongue out of its mouth, except when it snapped at the flies. There was a strong platonic friendship between Miss Jemima and Captain Barnabas Higginbotham; for he, too, was unmarried, and he

had the same ill opinion of your sex, my dear madam, that Miss Jemima had of, ours. The captain was a man of a slim and elegant figure; the less said about the face the better, a truth of which the captain himself was sensible, for it was a favourite maxim of his, "that in a man, everything is a slight, gentlemanlike figure." Captain Barnabas did not absolutely deny that the world was coming to an end, only he thought it would last his time.

Quite apart from all the rest, with the /nonchalant/ survey of virgin dandyism, Francis Hazeldean looked over one of the high starched neckcloths which were then the fashion,—a handsome lad, fresh from Eton for the summer holidays, but at that ambiguous age when one disdains the sports of the boy, and has not yet arrived at the resources of the man.

"I should be glad, Frank," said the squire, suddenly turning round to his son, "to see you take a little more interest in duties which, one day or other, you may be called upon to discharge. I can't bear to think that the property should fall into the hands of a fine gentleman, who will let things go to rack and ruin, instead of keeping them up as I do."

And the squire pointed to the stocks.

Master Frank's eye followed the direction of the cane, as well as his cravat would permit; and he said dryly,—

"Yes, sir; but how came the stocks to be so long out of repair?"

"Because one can't see to everything at once," retorted the squire, tartly. "When a man has got eight thousand acres to look after, he must do a bit at a time."

"Yes," said Captain Barnabas. "I know that by experience."

"The deuce you do!" cried the squire, bluntly. "Experience in eight thousand acres!"

"No; in my apartments in the Albany,—No. 3 A. I have had them ten years, and it was only last Christmas that I bought my Japan cat."

"Dear me," said Miss Jemima; "a Japan cat! that must be very curious. What sort of a creature is it?"

"Don't you know? Bless me, a thing with three legs, and holds toast! I never thought of it, I assure you, till my friend Cosey said to me one morning when he was breakfasting at my rooms, 'Higginbotham, how is it that you, who like to have things comfortable about you, don't have a cat?' 'Upon my life,' said I, 'one can't think of everything at a time,'—just like you, Squire."

"Pshaw," said Mr. Hazeldean, gruffly, "not at all like me. And I'll thank you another time, Cousin Higginbotham, not to put me out when I'm speaking on matters of importance; poking your cat into my stocks! They look something like now, my stocks, don't they, Harry? I declare that the whole village seems more respectable. It is astonishing how much a little improvement adds to the—to the—"

"Charm of the landscape," put in Miss Jemina, sentimentally.

The squire neither accepted nor rejected the suggested termination; but leaving his sentence uncompleted,

broke suddenly off with—

"And if I had listened to Parson Dale—"

"You would have done a very wise thing," said a voice behind, as the parson presented himself in the rear.

"Wise thing? Why, surely, Mr. Dale," said Mrs. Hazeldean, with spirit, for she always resented the least contradiction to her lord and master— perhaps as an interference with her own special right and prerogative!— "why, surely if it is necessary to have stocks, it is necessary to repair them."

"That's right! go it, Harry!" cried the squire, chuckling, and rubbing his hands as if he had been setting his terrier at the parson: "St—St— at him! Well, Master Dale, what do you say to that?"

"My dear ma'am," said the parson, replying in preference to the lady, "there are many institutions in the country which are very old, look very decayed, and don't seem of much use; but I would not pull them down for all that."

"You would reform them, then," said Mrs. Hazeldean, doubtfully, and with a look at her husband, as much as to say, "He is on politics now,—that's your business."

"No, I would not, ma'am," said the parson, stoutly. "What on earth would you do, then?" quoth the squire. "Just let 'em alone," said the parson. "Master Frank, there's a Latin maxim which was often put in the mouth of Sir Robert Walpole, and which they ought to put into the Eton grammar, 'Quieta non movere.' If things are quiet, let them be quiet! I would not destroy the stocks, because that might seem to the ill-disposed like a license to offend; and I would not repair the stocks, because that puts it into people's heads to get into them."

The squire was a stanch politician of the old school, and he did not like to think that, in repairing the stocks, he had perhaps been conniving at revolutionary principles.

"This constant desire of innovation," said Miss Jemima, suddenly mounting the more funereal of her two favourite hobbies, "is one of the great symptoms of the approaching crash. We are altering and mending and reforming, when in twenty years at the utmost the world itself may be destroyed!" The fair speaker paused, and Captain Barnabas said thoughtfully, "Twenty years!—the insurance officers rarely compute the best life at more than fourteen." He struck his hand on the stocks as he spoke, and added, with his usual consolatory conclusion, "The odds are that it will last our time, Squire."

But whether Captain Barnabas meant the stocks or the world he did not clearly explain, and no one took the trouble to inquire.

"Sir," said Master Frank to his father, with that furtive spirit of quizzing, which he had acquired amongst other polite accomplishments at Eton,— "sir, it is no use now considering whether the stocks should or should not have been repaired. The only question is, whom you will get to put into them."

"True," said the squire, with much gravity.

"Yes, there it is!" said the parson, mournfully. "If you would but learn 'non quieta movere'!"

"Don't spout your Latin at me, Parson," cried the squire, angrily; "I can give you as good as you bring, any day.

""Propria quae maribus tribuuntur mascula dicas.—
As in praesenti, perfectum format in avi.'

There," added the squire, turning triumphantly towards his Harry, who looked with great admiration at this unprecedented burst of learning on the part of Mr. Hazeldean,—*"there, two can play at that game! And now that we have all seen the stocks, we may as well go home and drink tea. Will you come up and play a rubber, Dale? No! hang it, man, I've not offended you?—you know my ways."*

"That I do, and they are among the things I would not have altered," cried the parson, holding out his hand cheerfully. The squire gave it a hearty shake, and Mrs. Hazeldean hastened to do the same.

"Do come; I am afraid we've been very rude: we are sad blunt folks. Do come; that's a dear good man; and of course poor Mrs. Dale too." Mrs. Hazeldean's favourite epithet for Mrs. Dale was poor, and that for reasons to be explained hereafter.

"I fear my wife has got one of her bad headaches, but I will give her your kind message, and at all events you may depend upon me."

"That's right," said the squire; *"in half an hour, eh? How d' ye do, my little man?"* as Lenny Fairfield, on his way home from some errand in the village, drew aside and pulled off his hat with both hands. *"Stop; you see those stocks, eh? Tell all the bad boys in the parish to take care how they get into them—a sad disgrace—you'll never be in such a quandary?"*

"That at least I will answer for," said the parson.

"And I too," added Mrs. Hazeldean, patting the boy's curly head. *"Tell your mother I shall come and have a good chat with her to-morrow evening."*

And so the party passed on, and Lenny stood still on the road, staring hard at the stocks, which stared back at him from its four great eyes.

Put Lenny did not remain long alone. As soon as the great folks had fairly disappeared, a large number of small folks emerged timorously from the neighbouring cottages, and approached the site of the stocks with much marvel, fear, and curiosity.

In fact, the renovated appearance of this monster /a propos de bottes/, as one may say—had already excited considerable sensation among the population of Hazeldean. And even as when an unexpected owl makes his appearance in broad daylight all the little birds rise from tree and hedgerow, and cluster round their ominous enemy, so now gathered all the much-excited villagers round the intrusive and portentous phenomenon.

"D' ye know what the diggins the squire did it for, Gaffer Solomons?" asked one many-childed matron, with a baby in arms, an urchin of three years old clinging fast to her petticoat, and her hand maternally holding back a more adventurous hero of six, who had a great desire to thrust his head into one of the grisly apertures. All eyes turned to a sage old man, the oracle of the village, who, leaning both hands on

his crutch, shook his head bodingly.

"Maw be," said Gaffer Solomons, "some of the boys ha' been robbing the orchards."

"Orchards!" cried a big lad, who seemed to think himself personally appealed to; "why, the bud's scarce off the trees yet!"

"No more it ain't," said the dame with many children, and she breathed more freely.

"Maw be," said Gaffer Solomons, "some o' ye has been sitting snares."

"What for?" said a stout, sullen-looking young fellow, whom conscience possibly pricked to reply,—"what for, when it bean't the season? And if a poor man did find a hear in his pocket i' the haytime, I should like to know if ever a squire in the world would let 'un off with the stocks, eh?"

This last question seemed a settler, and the wisdom of Gaffer Solomons went down fifty per cent in the public opinion of Hazeldean.

"Maw be," said the gaffer—this time with a thrilling effect, which restored his reputation,— "maw be some o' ye ha' been getting drunk, and making beestises o' yoursel's!"

There was a dead pause, for this suggestion applied too generally to be met with a solitary response. At last one of the women said, with a meaning glance at her husband,

"God bless the squire; he'll make some on us happy women if that's all!"

There then arose an almost unanimous murmur of approbation among the female part of the audience; and the men looked at each other, and then at the phenomenon, with a very hang-dog expression of countenance.

"Or, maw be," resumed Gaffer Solomons, encouraged to a fourth suggestion by the success of its predecessor,— "maw be some o' the misseses ha' been making a rumpus, and scolding their good men. I heard say in my granfeyther's time, arter old Mother Bang nigh died o' the ducking-stool, them 'ere stocks were first made for the women, out o' compassion like! And every one knows the squire is a koind-hearted man, God bless 'un!"

"God bless 'un!" cried the men, heartily; and they gathered lovingly round the phenomenon, like heathens of old round a tutelary temple. But then there rose one shrill clamour among the females as they retreated with involuntary steps towards the verge of the green, whence they glared at Solomons and the phenomenon with eyes so sparkling, and pointed at both with gestures so menacing, that Heaven only knows if a morsel of either would have remained much longer to offend the eyes of the justly- enraged matronage of Hazeldean, if fortunately Master Stirn, the squire's right-hand man, had not come up in the nick of time.

Master Stirn was a formidable personage,—more formidable than the squire himself,—as, indeed, a squire's right hand is generally more formidable than the head can pretend to be. He inspired the greater awe, because, like the stocks of which he was deputed guardian, his powers were undefined and obscure, and he had no particular place in the out-of-door establishment. He was not the steward, yet he did much of what ought to be the steward's work; he was not the farm-bailiff, for the squire called himself his own

farm-bailiff; nevertheless, Mr. Hazeldean sowed and ploughed, cropped and stocked, bought and sold, very much as Mr. Stirn condescended to advise. He was not the park-keeper, for he neither shot the deer nor superintended the preserves; but it was he who always found out who had broken a park pale or snared a rabbit. In short, what may be called all the harsher duties of a large landed proprietor devolved, by custom and choice, upon Mr. Stirn. If a labourer was to be discharged or a rent enforced, and the squire knew that he should be talked over, and that the steward would be as soft as himself, Mr. Stirn was sure to be the avenging messenger, to pronounce the words of fate; so that he appeared to the inhabitants of Hazeldean like the poet's /*Saeva Necessitas*/, a vague incarnation of remorseless power, armed with whips, nails, and wedges. The very brute creation stood in awe of Mr. Stirn. The calves knew that it was he who singled out which should be sold to the butcher, and huddled up into a corner with beating hearts at his grim footstep; the sow grunted, the duck quacked, the hen bristled her feathers and called to her chicks when Mr. Stirn drew near. Nature had set her stamp upon him. Indeed, it may be questioned whether the great M. de Chambray himself, surnamed the brave, had an aspect so awe-inspiring as that of Mr. Stirn; albeit the face of that hero was so terrible, that a man who had been his lackey, seeing his portrait after he had been dead twenty years, fell a trembling all over like a leaf!

"And what the plague are you doing here?" said Mr. Stirn, as he waved and smacked a great cart-whip which he held in his hand, "making such a hullabaloo, you women, you! that I suspect the squire will be sending out to know if the village is on fire. Go home, will ye? High time indeed to have the stocks ready, when you get squalling and conspiring under the very nose of a justice of the peace, just as the French revolutioners did afore they cut off their king's head! My hair stands on end to look at ye." But already, before half this address was delivered, the crowd had dispersed in all directions,—the women still keeping together, and the men sneaking off towards the ale-house. Such was the beneficent effect of the fatal stocks on the first day of their resuscitation. However, in the break up of every crowd there must always be one who gets off the last; and it so happened that our friend Lenny Fairfield, who had mechanically approached close to the stocks, the better to hear the oracular opinions of Gaffer Solomons, had no less mechanically, on the abrupt appearance of Mr. Stirn, crept, as he hoped, out of sight behind the trunk of the elm-tree which partially shaded the stocks; and there now, as if fascinated, he still cowered, not daring to emerge in full view of Mr. Stirn, and in immediate reach of the cartwhip, when the quick eye of the right-hand man detected his retreat.

"Hallo, sir—what the deuce, laying a mine to blow up the stocks! just like Guy Fox and the Gunpowder Plot, I declares! What ha' you got in your willanous little fist there?"

"Nothing, sir," said Lenny, opening his palm. "Nothing—um!" said Mr. Stirn, much dissatisfied; and then, as he gazed more deliberately, recognizing the pattern boy of the village, a cloud yet darker gathered over his brow; for Mr. Stirn, who valued himself much on his learning, and who, indeed, by dint of more knowledge as well as more wit than his neighbours, had attained his present eminent station of life, was extremely anxious that his only son should also be a scholar. That wish—

"The gods dispersed in empty air."

Master Stirn was a notable dunce at the parson's school, while Lenny Fairfield was the pride and boast of it; therefore Mr. Stirn was naturally, and almost justifiably, ill-disposed towards Lenny Fairfield, who had appropriated to himself the praises which Mr. Stirn had designed for his son.

"Um!" said the right-hand man, glowering on Lenny malignantly, "you are the pattern boy of the village, are you? Very well, sir! then I put these here stocks under your care, and you'll keep off the other boys

from sitting on 'em, and picking off the paint, and playing three-holes and chuck-farthing, as I declare they've been a doing, just in front of the elewation. Now, you knows your 'sponsibilities, little boy,—and a great honour they are too, for the like o' you.

If any damage be done, it is to you I shall look; d' ye understand?—and that's what the squire says to me. So you sees what it is to be a pattern boy, Master Lenny!" With that Mr. Stirn gave a loud crack of the cart-whip, by way of military honours, over the head of the vicegerent he had thus created, and strode off to pay a visit to two young unsuspecting pups, whose ears and tails he had graciously promised their proprietors to crop that evening. Nor, albeit few charges could be more obnoxious than that of deputy-governor or /charge-d'affaires extraordinaires/ to the parish stocks, nor one more likely to render Lenny Fairfield odious to his contemporaries, ought he to have been insensible to the signal advantage of his condition over that of the two sufferers, against whose ears and tails Mr. Stirn had no special motives of resentment. To every bad there is a worse; and fortunately for little boys, and even for grown men, whom the Stirns of the world regard malignly, the majesty and law protect their ears, and the merciful forethought of nature deprived their remote ancestors of the privilege of entailing tails upon them. Had it been otherwise—considering what handles tails would have given to the oppressor, how many traps envy would have laid for them, how often they must have been scratched and mutilated by the briars of life, how many good excuses would have been found for lopping, docking, and trimming them—I fear that only the lap-dogs of Fortune would have gone to the grave tail-whole.

CHAPTER XII.

The card-table was set out in the drawing-room at Hazeldean Hall; though the little party were still lingering in the deep recess of the large bay window, which (in itself of dimensions that would have swallowed up a moderate-sized London parlour) held the great round tea-table, with all appliances and means to boot,—for the beautiful summer moon shed on the sward so silvery a lustre, and the trees cast so quiet a shadow, and the flowers and new-mown hay sent up so grateful a perfume, that to close the windows, draw the curtains, and call for other lights than those of heaven would have been an abuse of the prose of life which even Captain Barnabas, who regarded whist as the business of town and the holiday of the country, shrank from suggesting. Without, the scene, beheld by the clear moonlight, had the beauty peculiar to the garden-ground round those old-fashioned country residences which, though a little modernized, still preserve their original character,—the velvet lawn, studded with large plots of flowers, shaded and scented, here to the left by lilacs, laburnums, and rich syringas; there, to the right, giving glimpses, over low clipped yews, of a green bowling-alley, with the white columns of a summer-house built after the Dutch taste, in the reign of William III.; and in front stealing away under covert of those still cedars, into the wilder landscape of the well-wooded undulating park. Within, viewed by the placid glimmer of the moon, the scene was no less characteristic of the abodes of that race which has no parallel in other lands, and which, alas! is somewhat losing its native idiosyncrasies in this,—the stout country gentleman, not the fine gentleman of the country; the country gentleman somewhat softened and civilized from the mere sportsman or farmer, but still plain and homely; relinquishing the old hall for the drawing-room, and with books not three months old on his table, instead of Fox's "Martyrs" and Baker's "Chronicle," yet still retaining many a sacred old prejudice, that, like the knots in his native oak, rather adds to the ornament of the grain than takes from the strength of the tree. Opposite to the window, the high chimneypiece rose to the heavy cornice of the ceiling, with dark panels glistening against the moonlight. The broad and rather clumsy chintz sofas and settees of the reign of George III. contrasted at intervals with the tall-backed chairs of a far more distant generation, when ladies in fardingales and gentlemen in trunk-hose seem never to have indulged in horizontal positions. The walls, of shining wainscot, were thickly covered, chiefly with family pictures; though now and then some Dutch fair or battle-piece showed that a former proprietor had been less exclusive in his taste for the arts. The pianoforte stood open near the fireplace; a long dwarf bookcase at the far end added its sober smile to the room. That bookcase contained what was called "The Lady's Library,"—a collection commenced by the squire's grandmother, of pious memory, and completed by his mother, who had more taste for the lighter letters, with but little addition from the bibliomaniac tendencies of the present Mrs. Hazeldean, who, being no great reader, contented herself with subscribing to the Book Club. In this feminine Bodleian, the sermons collected by Mrs. Hazeldean, the grandmother, stood cheek-by-jowl beside the novels purchased by Mrs. Hazeldean, the mother,—

"Mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho!"

But, to be sure, the novels, in spite of very inflammatory titles, such as "Fatal Sensibility," "Errors of the

Heart," etc., were so harmless that I doubt if the sermons could have had much to say against their next-door neighbours,—and that is all that can be expected by the best of us.

A parrot dozing on his perch; some goldfish fast asleep in their glass bowl; two or three dogs on the rug, and Flimsey, Miss Jemima's spaniel, curled into a ball on the softest sofa; Mrs. Hazeldean's work-table rather in disorder, as if it had been lately used; the "St. James's Chronicle" dangling down from a little tripod near the squire's armchair; a high screen of gilt and stamped leather fencing off the card-table,—all these, dispersed about a room large enough to hold them all and not seem crowded, offered many a pleasant resting-place for the eye, when it turned from the world of nature to the home of man.

But see, Captain Barnabas, fortified by his fourth cup of tea, has at length summoned courage to whisper to Mrs. Hazeldean, "Don't you think the parson will be impatient for his rubber?" Mrs. Hazeldean glanced at the parson and smiled; but she gave the signal to the captain, and the bell was rung, lights were brought in, the curtains let down; in a few moments more, the group had collected round the cardtable. The best of us are but human—that is not a new truth, I confess, but yet people forget it every day of their lives—and I dare say there are many who are charitably thinking at this very moment that my parson ought not to be playing at whist. All I can say to those rigid disciplinarians is, "Every man has his favourite sin: whist was Parson Dale's!—ladies and gentlemen, what is yours?" In truth, I must not set up my poor parson, nowadays, as a pattern parson,—it is enough to have one pattern in a village no bigger than Hazeldean, and we all know that Lenny Fairfield has bespoken that place, and got the patronage of the stocks for his emoluments! Parson Dale was ordained, not indeed so very long ago, but still at a time when Churchmen took it a great deal more easily than they do now. The elderly parson of that day played his rubber as a matter of course, the middle-aged parson was sometimes seen riding to cover (I knew a schoolmaster, a doctor of divinity, and an excellent man, whose pupils were chiefly taken from the highest families in England, who hunted regularly three times a week during the season), and the young parson would often sing a capital song—not composed by David—and join in those rotatory dances, which certainly David never danced before the ark.

Does it need so long an exordium to excuse thee, poor Parson Dale, for turning up that ace of spades with so triumphant a smile at thy partner? I must own that nothing which could well add to the parson's offence was wanting. In the first place, he did not play charitably, and merely to oblige other people. He delighted in the game, he rejoiced in the game, his whole heart was in the game,—neither was he indifferent to the mammon of the thing, as a Christian pastor ought to have been. He looked very sad when he took his shillings out of his purse, and exceedingly pleased when he put the shillings that had just before belonged to other people into it. Finally, by one of those arrangements common with married people who play at the same table, 'Mr. and—Mrs. Hazeldean were invariably partners, and no two people could play worse; while Captain Barnabas, who had played at Graham's with honour and profit, necessarily became partner to Parson Dale, who himself played a good steady parsonic game. So that, in strict truth, it was hardly fair play; it was almost swindling,—the combination of these two great dons against that innocent married couple! Mr. Dale, it is true, was aware of this disproportion of force, and had often proposed either to change partners or to give odds, —propositions always scornfully scouted by the squire and his lady, so that the parson was obliged to pocket his conscience, together with the ten points which made his average winnings.

The strangest thing in the world is the different way in which whist affects the temper. It is no test of temper, as some pretend,—not at all! The best-tempered people in the world grow snappish at whist; and I have seen the most testy and peevish in the ordinary affairs of life bear their losses with the stoicism of

Epictetus. This was notably manifested in the contrast between the present adversaries of the Hall and the Rectory. The squire, who was esteemed as choleric a gentleman as most in the county, was the best-humoured fellow you could imagine when you set him down to whist opposite the sunny face of his wife. You never heard one of those incorrigible blunderers scold each other; on the contrary, they only laughed when they threw away the game, with four by honours in their hands. The utmost that was ever said was a "Well, Harry, that was the oddest trump of yours. Ho, ho, ho!" or a "Bless me, Hazeldean—why, they made three tricks in clubs, and you had the ace in your hand all the time! Ha, ha, ha!"

Upon which occasions Captain Barnabas, with great goodhumour, always echoed both the squire's Ho, ho, ho! and Mrs. Hazeldean's Ha, ha, ha!

Not so the parson. He had so keen and sportsmanlike an interest in the game, that even his adversaries' mistakes ruffled him. And you would hear him, with elevated voice and agitated gestures, laying down the law, quoting Hoyle, appealing to all the powers of memory and common-sense against the very delinquencies by which he was enriched, —a waste of eloquence that always heightened the hilarity of Mr. and Mrs. Hazeldean. While these four were thus engaged, Mrs. Dale, who had come with her husband despite her headache, sat on the sofa beside Miss Jemima, or rather beside Miss Jemima's Flimsey, which had already secured the centre of the sofa, and snarled at the very idea of being disturbed. And Master Frank—at a table by himself—was employed sometimes in looking at his pumps and sometimes at Gilray's Caricatures, which his mother had provided for his intellectual requirements. Mrs. Dale, in her heart, liked Miss Jemima better than Mrs. Hazeldean, of whom she was rather in awe, notwithstanding they had been little girls together, and occasionally still called each other Harry and Carry. But those tender diminutives belonged to the "Dear" genus, and were rarely employed by the ladies, except at times when, had they been little girls still, and the governess out of the way, they would have slapped and pinched each other. Mrs. Dale was still a very pretty woman, as Mrs. Hazeldean was still a very fine woman. Mrs. Dale painted in water-colours, and sang, and made card-racks and penholders, and was called an "elegant, accomplished woman;" Mrs. Hazeldean cast up the squire's accounts, wrote the best part of his letters, kept a large establishment in excellent order, and was called "a clever, sensible woman." Mrs. Dale had headaches and nerves; Mrs. Hazeldean had neither nerves nor headaches. Mrs. Dale said, "Harry had no real harm in her, but was certainly very masculine;" Mrs. Hazeldean said, "Carry would be a good creature but for her airs and graces." Mrs. Dale said Mrs. Hazeldean was "just made to be a country squire's lady;" Mrs. Hazeldean said, "Mrs. Dale was the last person in the world who ought to have been a parson's wife." Carry, when she spoke of Harry to a third person, said, "Dear Mrs. Hazeldean;" Harry, when she referred incidentally to Carry, said, "Poor Mrs. Dale." And now the reader knows why Mrs. Hazeldean called Mrs. Dale "poor,"—at least as well as I do. For, after all, the word belonged to that class in the female vocabulary which may be called "obscure significants," resembling the Konx Ompax, which hath so puzzled the inquirers into the Eleusinian Mysteries: the application is rather to be illustrated than the meaning to be exactly explained.

"That's really a sweet little dog of yours, Jemima," said Mrs. Dale, who was embroidering the word CAROLINE on the border of a cambric pocket handkerchief; but edging a little farther off, as she added, "he'll not bite, will he?"

"Dear me, no!" said Miss Jemima; "but" (she added in a confidential whisper) "don't say he,—'t is a lady dog!"

"Oh," said Mrs. Dale, edging off still farther, as if that confession of the creature's sex did not serve to

allay her apprehensions,—“oh, then, you carry your aversion to the gentlemen even to lap-dogs,—that is being consistent indeed, Jemima!”

MISS JEMIMA.—“I had a gentleman dog once,—a pug!—pugs are getting very scarce now. I thought he was so fond of me—he snapped at every one else; the battles I fought for him! Well, will you believe—I had been staying with my friend Miss Smilecox at Cheltenham. Knowing that William is so hasty, and his boots are so thick, I trembled to think what a kick might do. So, on coming here I left Bluff—that was his name—with Miss Smilecox.” (A pause.)

MRS. DALE (looking up languidly).—“Well, my love?”

MISS JEMIMA.—“Will you believe it, I say, when I returned to Cheltenham, only three months afterwards, Miss Smilecox had seduced his affections from me, and the ungrateful creature did not even know me again? A pug, too—yet people say pugs are faithful! I am sure they ought to be, nasty things! I have never had a gentleman dog since,—they are all alike, believe me, heartless, selfish creatures.”

MRS. DALE.—“Pugs? I dare say they are!”

MISS JEMIMA (with spirit).—“MEN!—I told you it was a gentleman dog!”

MRS. DALE (apologetically).—“True, my love, but the whole thing was so mixed up!”

MISS JEMIMA.—“You saw that cold-blooded case of Breach of Promise of Marriage in the papers,—an old wretch, too, of sixty-four. No age makes them a bit better. And when one thinks that the end of all flesh is approaching, and that—”

MRS. DALE (quickly, for she prefers Miss Jemima's other hobby to that black one upon which she is preparing to precede the bier of the universe).—“Yes, my love, we'll avoid that subject, if you please. Mr. Dale has his own opinions, and it becomes me, you know, as a parson's wife” (said smilingly: Mrs. Dale has as pretty a dimple as any of Miss Jemima's, and makes more of that one than Miss Jemima of three), “to agree with him,—that is, in theology.”

MISS JEMIMA (earnestly).—“But the thing is so clear, if you will but look into—”

MRS. DALE (putting her hand on Miss Jemima's lips playfully).—“Not a word more. Pray, what do you think of the squire's tenant at the Casino, Signor Riccabocca? An interesting creature, is he not?”

MISS JEMIMA.—“Interesting! not to me. Interesting? Why is he interesting?”

Mrs. Dale is silent, and turns her handkerchief in her pretty little white hands, appearing to contemplate the R in Caroline.

MISS JEMIMA (half pettishly, half coaxingly).—“Why is he interesting? I scarcely ever looked at him; they say he smokes, and never eats. Ugly, too!”

MRS. DALE.—“Ugly,—no. A fine bead,—very like Dante's; but what is beauty?”

MISS JEMIMA.—“Very true: what is it indeed? Yes, as you say, I think there is something interesting about him; he looks melancholy, but that may be because he is poor.”

MRS. DALE.—"It is astonishing how little one feels poverty when one loves. Charles and I were very poor once,—before the squire—" Mrs. Dale paused, looked towards the squire, and murmured a blessing, the warmth of which brought tears into her eyes. "Yes," she added, after a pause, "we were very poor, but we were happy even then,—more thanks to Charles than to me;" and tears from a new source again dimmed those quick, lively eyes, as the little woman gazed fondly on her husband, whose brows were knit into a black frown over a bad hand.

MISS JEMIMA.—"It is only those horrid men who think of money as a source of happiness. I should be the last person to esteem a gentleman less because he was poor."

MRS. DALE.—"I wonder the squire does not ask Signor Riccabocca here more often. Such an acquisition we find him!"

The squire's voice from the card-table.—"Whom ought I to ask more often, Mrs. Dale?"

Parson's voice, impatiently.—"Come, come, come, squire: play to my queen of diamonds,—do!"

SQUIRE.—"There, I trump it! pick up the trick, Mrs. H."

PARSON.—"Stop! Stop! trump my diamond?"

THE CAPTAIN (solemnly).—"Trick turned; play on, Squire."

SQUIRE.—"The king of diamonds."

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—"Lord! Hazeldean, why, that's the most barefaced revoke,—ha, ha, ha! trump the queen of diamonds and play out the king! well, I never! ha, ha, ha!"

CAPTAIN BARNABAS (in tenor).—"Ha, ha, ha!"

SQUIRE.—"Ho, ho, ho! bless my soul! ho, ho, ho!"

CAPTAIN BARNABAS (in bass).—"Ho, ho, ho!"

Parson's voice raised, but drowned by the laughter of his adversaries and the firm, clear tone of Captain Barnabas.—"Three to our score!—game!"

SQUIRE (wiping his eyes).—"No help for it; Harry, deal for me. Whom ought I to ask, Mrs. Dale?" (Waxing angry.) "First time I ever heard the hospitality of Hazeldean called in question!"

MRS. DALE.—"My dear sir, I beg a thousand pardons, but listeners—you know the proverb."

SQUIRE (growling like a bear).—"I hear nothing but proverbs ever since we had that Mounseer among us. Please to speak plainly, ma'am."

Mrs. DALE (sliding into a little temper at being thus roughly accosted).—"It was of Mounseer, as you call him, that I spoke, Mr. Hazeldean."

SQUIRE.—"What! Rickeybockey?"

MRS. DALE (attempting the pure Italian accentuation).—"Signor Riccabocca."

PARSON (slapping his cards on the table in despair).—"Are we playing at whist, or are we not?"

The squire, who is fourth player, drops the king to Captain Higginbotham's lead of the ace of hearts. Now the captain has left queen, knave, and two other hearts, four trumps to the queen, and nothing to win a trick with in the two other suits. This hand is therefore precisely one of those in which, especially after the fall of that king of hearts in the adversary's hand, it becomes a matter of reasonable doubt whether to lead trumps or not. The captain hesitates, and not liking to play out his good hearts with the certainty of their being trumped by the squire, nor, on the other hand, liking to open the other suits, in which he has not a card that can assist his partner, resolves, as becomes a military man in such dilemma, to make a bold push and lead out trumps in the chance of finding his partner strong and so bringing in his long suit.

SQUIRE (taking advantage of the much meditating pause made by the captain).—"Mrs. Dale, it is not my fault. I have asked Rickeybockey,—time out of mind. But I suppose I am not fine enough for those foreign chaps. He'll not come,—that's all I know."

PARSON (aghast at seeing the captain play out trumps, of which he, Mr. Dale, has only two, wherewith he expects to ruff the suit of spades, of which he has only one, the cards all falling in suits, while he has not a single other chance of a trick in his hand).—"Really, Squire, we had better give up playing if you put out my partner in this extraordinary way,—jabber, jabber, jabber!"

SQUIRE.—"Well, we must be good children, Harry. What!—trumps, Barney? Thank ye for that!" And the squire might well be grateful, for the unfortunate adversary has led up to ace king knave, with two other trumps. Squire takes the parson's ten with his knave, and plays out ace king; then, having cleared all the trumps except the captain's queen and his own remaining two, leads off tierce major in that very suit of spades of which the parson has only one,—and the captain, indeed, but two,—forces out the captain's queen, and wins the game in a canter.

PARSON (with a look at the captain which might have become the awful brows of Jove, when about to thunder).—"That, I suppose, is the new- fashioned London play! In my time the rule was, 'First save the game, then try to win it.'"

CAPTAIN.—"Could not save it, sir."

PARSON (exploding)—"Not save it!—two ruffs in my own hand,—two tricks certain till you took them out! Monstrous! The rashest trump."—Seizes the cards, spreads them on the table, lip quivering, hands trembling, tries to show how five tricks could have been gained,—N.B. It is /short/ whist which Captain Barnabas had introduced at the Hall,—can't make out more than four; Captain smiles triumphantly; Parson in a passion, and not at all convinced, mixes all the cards together again, and falling back in his chair, groans, with tears in his voice.—"The cruellest trump! the most wanton cruelty!"

The Hazeldeans in chorus.—"Ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha!" The captain, who does not laugh this time, and whose turn it is to deal, shuffles the cards for the conquering game of the rubber with as much caution and prolixity as Fabius might have employed in posting his men. The squire gets up to stretch his legs, and, the insinuation against his hospitality recurring to his thoughts, calls out to his wife, "Write to Rickeybockey to-morrow yourself, Harry, and ask him to come and spend two or three days here. There, Mrs. Dale, you hear me?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dale, putting her hands to her ears in implied rebuke at the loudness of the squire's tone. "My dear sir, do remember that I'm a sad nervous creature."

"Beg pardon," muttered Mr. Hazeldean, turning to his son, who having got tired of the caricatures, had fished out for himself the great folio County History, which was the only book in the library that the squire much valued, and which he usually kept under lock and key, in his study, together with the field-books and steward's accounts, but which he had reluctantly taken into the drawing-room that day, in order to oblige Captain Higginbotham. For the Higginbothams—an old Saxon family, as the name evidently denotes—had once possessed lands in that very county; and the captain, during his visits to Hazeldean Hall, was regularly in the habit of asking to look into the County History, for the purpose of refreshing his eyes, and renovating his sense of ancestral dignity, with the following paragraph therein:

To the left of the village of Dunder, and pleasantly situated in a hollow, lies Botham Hall, the residence of the ancient family of Higginbotham, as it is now commonly called. Yet it appears by the county rolls, and sundry old deeds, that the family formerly styled itself Higges, till the Manor House lying in Botham, they gradually assumed the appellation of

Higges-in-Botham, and in process of time, yielding to the corruptions of the vulgar, Higginbotham."

"What, Frank! my County History!" cried the squire. "Mrs. H., he has got my County History!"

"Well, Hazeldean, it is time he should know something about the county."

"Ay, and history too," said Mrs. Dale, malevolently, for the little temper was by no means blown over.

FRANK.—"I'll not hurt it, I assure you, sir. But I'm very much interested just at present."

THE CAPTAIN (putting down the cards to cut).—"You've got hold of that passage about Botham Hall, page 706, eh?"

FRANK.—"No; I was trying to make out how far it is to Mr. Leslie's place, Rood Hall. Do you know, Mother?"

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—"I can't say I do. The Leslies don't mix with the county; and Rood lies very much out of the way."

FRANK.—"Why don't they mix with the county?"

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—"I believe they are poor, and therefore I suppose they are proud; they are an old family."

PARSON (thrumming on the table with great impatience).—"Old fiddle-dee!—talking of old families when the cards have been shuffled this half-hour!"

CAPTAIN BARNABAS.—"Will you cut for your partner, ma'am?"

SQUIRE (who has been listening to Frank's inquiries with a musing air).—"Why do you want to know the distance to Rood Hall?"

FRANK (rather hesitatingly).—"Because Randal Leslie is there for the holidays, sir."

PARSON.—"Your wife has cut for you, Mr. Hazeldean. I don't think it was quite fair; and my partner has turned up a deuce,—deuce of hearts. Please to come and play, if you mean to play."

The squire returns to the table, and in a few minutes the game is decided by a dexterous finesse of the captain against the Hazeldeans. The clock strikes ten; the servants enter with a tray; the squire counts up his own and his wife's losings; and the captain and parson divide sixteen shillings between them.

SQUIRE.—"There, Parson, I hope you'll be in a better humour. You win enough out of us to set up a coach-and-four."

"Tut!" muttered the parson; "at the end of the year, I'm not a penny the richer for it all."

And, indeed, monstrous as that assertion seemed, it was perfectly true, for the parson portioned out his gains into three divisions. One-third he gave to Mrs. Dale, for her own special pocket-money; what

became of the second third he never owned even to his better half,—but certain it was, that every time the parson won seven-and-sixpence, half-a-crown, which nobody could account for, found its way to the poor-box; while the remaining third, the parson, it is true, openly and avowedly retained; but I have no manner of doubt that, at the year's end, it got to the poor quite as safely as if it had been put into the box.

The party had now gathered round the tray, and were helping themselves to wine and water, or wine without water,—except Frank, who still remained poring over the map in the County History, with his head leaning on his hands, and his fingers plunged in his hair.

"Frank," said Mrs. Hazeldean, "I never saw you so studious before."

Frank started up and coloured, as if ashamed of being accused of too much study in anything.

SQUIRE (with a little embarrassment in his voice).—"Pray, Frank, what do you know of Randal Leslie?"

"Why, sir, he is at Eton."

"What sort of a boy is he?" asked Mrs. Hazeldean.

Frank hesitated, as if reflecting, and then answered, "They say he is the cleverest boy in the school. But then he saps."

"In other words," said Mr. Dale, with proper parsonic gravity, "he understands that he was sent to school to learn his lessons, and he learns them. You call that sapping? call it doing his duty. But pray, who and what is this Randal Leslie, that you look so discomposed, Squire?"

"Who and what is he?" repeated the squire, in a low growl. "Why, you know Mr. Audley Egerton married Miss Leslie, the great heiress; and this boy is a relation of hers. I may say," added the squire, "that he is a near relation of mine, for his grandmother was a Hazeldean; but all I know about the Leslies is, that Mr. Egerton, as I am told, having no children of his own, took up young Randal (when his wife died, poor woman), pays for his schooling, and has, I suppose, adopted the boy as his heir. Quite welcome. Frank and I want nothing from Mr. Audley Egerton, thank Heaven!"

"I can well believe in your brother's generosity to his wife's kindred," said the parson, sturdily, "for I am sure Mr. Egerton is a man of strong feeling."

"What the deuce do you know about Mr. Egerton? I don't suppose you could ever have even spoken to him."

"Yes," said the parson, colouring up, and looking confused. "I had some conversation with him once;" and observing the squire's surprise, he added—"when I was curate at Lansmere, and about a painful business connected with the family of one of my parishioners."

"Oh, one of your parishioners at Lansmere,—one of the constituents Mr. Audley Egerton threw over, after all the pains I had taken to get him his seat. Rather odd you should never have mentioned this before, Mr. Dale!"

"My dear sir," said the parson, sinking his voice, and in a mild tone of conciliatory expostulation, "you are so irritable whenever Mr. Egerton's name is mentioned at all."

"Irritable!" exclaimed the squire, whose wrath had been long simmering, and now fairly boiled over,—"irritable, sir! I should think so: a man for whom I stood godfather at the hustings, Mr. Dale! a man for whose sake I was called a 'prize ox,' Mr. Dale! a man for whom I was hissed in a market-place, Mr. Dale! a man for whom I was shot at, in cold blood, by an officer in His Majesty's service, who lodged a ball in my right shoulder, Mr. Dale! a man who had the ingratitude, after all this, to turn his back on the landed interest,—to deny that there was any agricultural distress in a year which broke three of the best farmers I ever had, Mr. Dale!—a man, sir, who made a speech on the Currency which was complimented by Ricardo, a Jew! Good heavens! a pretty parson you are, to stand up for a fellow complimented by a Jew! Nice ideas you must have of Christianity! Irritable, sir!" now fairly roared the squire, adding to the thunder of his voice the cloud of a brow, which evinced a menacing ferocity that might have done honour to Bussy d'Amboise or Fighting Fitzgerald. "Sir, if that man had not been my own half-brother, I'd have called him out. I have stood my ground before now. I have had a ball in my right shoulder. Sir, I'd have called him out."

"Mr. Hazeldean! Mr. Hazeldean! I'm shocked at you," cried the parson; and, putting his lips close to the squire's ear, he went on in a whisper, "What an example to your son! You'll have him fighting duels one of these days, and nobody to blame but yourself."

This warning cooled Mr. Hazeldean; and muttering, "Why the deuce did you set me off?" he fell back into his chair, and began to fan himself with his pocket-handkerchief.

The parson skilfully and remorselessly pursued the advantage he had gained. "And now that you may have it in your power to show civility and kindness to a boy whom Mr. Egerton has taken up, out of respect to his wife's memory,—a kinsman, you say, of your own, and who has never offended you,—a boy whose diligence in his studies proves him to be an excellent companion to your son-Frank" (here the parson raised his voice), "I suppose you would like to call on young Leslie, as you were studying the county map so attentively."

"Yes, yes," answered Frank, rather timidly, "if my father does not object to it. Leslie has been very kind to me, though he is in the sixth form, and, indeed, almost the head of the school."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Hazeldean, "one studious boy has a fellow feeling for another; and though you enjoy your holidays, Frank, I am sure you read hard at school."

Mrs. Dale opened her eyes very wide, and stared in astonishment.

Mrs. Hazeldean retorted that look, with great animation. "Yes, Carry," said she, tossing her head, "though you may not think Frank clever, his masters find him so. He got a prize last half. That beautiful book, Frank—hold up your head, my love—what did you get it for?"

FRANK (reluctantly).—"Verses, ma'am."

MRS. HAZELDEAN (with triumph).—"Verses!—there, Carry, verses!"

FRANK (in a hurried tone).—"Yes, but Leslie wrote them for me."

MRS. HAZELDEAN (recoiling).—"O Frank! a prize for what another did for you—that was mean."

FRANK (ingenuously).—"You can't be more ashamed, Mother, than I was when they gave me the prize."

MRS. DALE (though previously provoked at being snubbed by Harry, now showing the triumph of generosity over temper).—"I beg your pardon, Frank. Your mother must be as proud of that shame as she was of the prize."

Mrs. Hazeldean puts her arm round Frank's neck, smiles beamingly on Mrs. Dale, and converses with her son in a low tone about Randal Leslie. Miss Jemima now approached Carry, and said in an "aside," "But we are forgetting poor Mr. Riccabocca. Mrs. Hazeldean, though the dearest creature in the world, has such a blunt way of inviting people—don't you think if you were to say a word to him, Carry?"

MRS. DALE (kindly, as she wraps her shawl round her).—"Suppose you write the note yourself? Meanwhile I shall see him, no doubt."

PARSON (putting his hand on the squire's shoulder).—"You forgive my impertinence, my kind friend. We parsons, you know, are apt to take strange liberties, when we honour and love folks as I do."

"Fish," said the squire; but his hearty smile came to his lips in spite of himself. "You always get your own way, and I suppose Frank must ride over and see this pet of my—"

"Brother's," quoth the parson, concluding the sentence in a tone which gave to the sweet word so sweet a sound that the squire would not correct the parson, as he had been about to correct himself.

Mr. Dale moved on; but as he passed Captain Barnabas, the benignant character of his countenance changed sadly. "The cruellest trump, Captain Higginbotham!" said he sternly, and stalked by-majestic.

The night was so fine that the parson and his wife, as they walked home, made a little detour through the shrubbery.

MRS. DALE.—"I think I have done a good piece of work to-night."

PARSON (rousing himself from a revery).—"Have you, Carry?—it will be a very pretty handkerchief."

MRS. DALE.—"Handkerchief?—nonsense, dear. Don't you think it would be a very happy thing for both if Jemima and Signor Riccabocca could be brought together?"

PARSON.—"Brought together!"

MRS. DALE.—"You do snap up one so, my dear; I mean if I could make a match of it."

PARSON.—"I think Riccabocca is a match already, not only for Jemima, but yourself into the bargain."

MRS. DALE (smiling loftily).—"Well, we shall see. Was not Jemima's fortune about L4000?"

PARSON (dreamily, for he is relapsing fast into his interrupted revery).
—"Ay—ay—I dare say."

MRS. DALE.—"And she must have saved! I dare say it is nearly L6000 by this time; eh! Charles dear, you really are so—good gracious, what's that!"

As Mrs. Dale made this exclamation, they had just emerged from the shrubbery into the village green.

PARSON.—"What's what?"

MRS. DALE (pinching her husband's arm very nippingly). "That thing— there—there."

PARSON.—"Only the new stocks, Carry; I don't wonder they frighten you, for you are a very sensible woman. I only wish they would frighten the squire."

CHAPTER XIII.

[Supposed to be a letter from Mrs. Hazeldean to A. Riccabocca, Esq.,
The Casino; but, edited, and indeed composed, by Miss Jemima
Hazeldean.]

HAZELDEAN HALL.

DEAR SIR,—To a feeling heart it must always be painful to give pain to another, and (though I am sure unconsciously) you have given the greatest pain to poor Mr. Hazeldean and myself, indeed to all our little circle, in so cruelly refusing our attempts to become better acquainted with a gentleman we so highly ESTEEM. Do, pray, dear sir, make us the amende honorable, and give us the pleasure of your company for a few days at the Hall. May we expect you Saturday next?—our dinner hour is six o'clock.

With the best compliments of Mr. and Miss Jemima Hazeldean, believe me, my dear sir,

Yours truly, H. H.

Miss Jemima having carefully sealed this note, which Mrs. Hazeldean had very willingly deputed her to write, took it herself into the stable-yard, in order to give the groom proper instructions to wait for an answer. But while she was speaking to the man, Frank, equipped for riding, with more than his usual dandyism, came into the yard, calling for his pony in a loud voice; and singling out the very groom whom Miss Jemima was addressing—for, indeed, he was the smartest of all in the squire's stables—told him to saddle the gray pad and accompany the pony.

"No, Frank," said Miss Jemima, you can't have George; your father wants him to go on a message,—you can take Mat."

"Mat, indeed!" said Frank, grumbling with some reason; for Mat was a surly old fellow, who tied a most indefensible neckcloth, and always contrived to have a great patch on his boots,—besides, he called Frank "Master," and obstinately refused to trot down hill,—"Mat, indeed! let Mat take the message, and George go with me."

But Miss Jemima had also her reasons for rejecting Mat. Mat's foible was not servility, and he always showed true English independence in all houses where he was not invited to take his ale in the servants' hall. Mat might offend Signor Riccabocca, and spoil all. An animated altercation ensued, in the midst of which the squire and his wife entered the yard, with the intention of driving in the conjugal gig to the market town. The matter was referred to the natural umpire by both the contending parties.

The squire looked with great contempt on his son. "And what do you want a groom at all for? Are you

afraid of tumbling off the pony?"

FRANK.—"No, Sir; but I like to go as a gentleman, when I pay a visit to a gentleman!"

SQUIRE (in high wrath).—"You precious puppy! I think I'm as good a gentleman as you any day, and I should like to know when you ever saw me ride to call on a neighbour with a fellow jingling at my heels, like that upstart Ned Spankie, whose father kept a cotton mill. First time I ever heard of a Hazeldean thinking a livery coat was necessary to prove his gentility!"

MRS. HAZELDEAN (observing Frank colouring, and about to reply).—"Hush, Frank, never answer your father,—and you are going to call on Mr. Leslie?"

"Yes, ma'am, and I am very much obliged to my father for letting me," said Frank, taking the squire's hand.

"Well, but, Frank," continued Mrs. Hazeldean, "I think you heard that the Leslies were very poor."

FRANK.—"Eh, Mother?"

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—"And would you run the chance of wounding the pride of a gentleman as well born as yourself by affecting any show of being richer than he is?"

SQUIRE (with great admiration).—"Harry, I'd give L10 to have said that!"

FRANK (leaving the squire's hand to take his mother's).—"You're quite right, Mother; nothing could be more snobbish!"

SQUIRE. "Give us your fist, too, sir; you'll be a chip of the old block, after all."

Frank smiled, and walked off to his pony.

MRS. HAZELDEAN (to Miss Jemima).—"Is that the note you were to write for me?"

MISS JEMIMA.—"Yes; I supposed you did not care about seeing it, so I have sealed it, and given it to George."

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—"But Frank will pass close by the Casino on his way to the Leslies'. It may be more civil if he leaves the note himself."

MISS JEMIMA (hesitatingly).—"Do you think so?"

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—" Yes, certainly. Frank, Frank, as you pass by the Casino, call on Mr. Riccabocca, give this note, and say we shall be heartily glad if he will come." Frank nods.

"Stop a bit," cried the squire. "If Rickeybockey is at home, 't is ten to one if he don't ask you to take a glass of wine! If he does, mind, 't is worse than asking you to take a turn on the rack. Faugh! you remember, Harry?—I thought it was all up with me."

"Yes," cried Mrs. Hazeldean; "for Heaven's sake not a drop. Wine, indeed!"

"Don't talk of it," cried the squire, making a wry face.

"I'll take care, Sir!" said Frank, laughing as he disappeared within the stable, followed by Miss Jemima, who now coaxingly makes it up with him, and does not leave off her admonitions to be extremely polite to the poor foreign gentleman till Frank gets his foot into the stirrup, and the pony, who knows whom he has got to deal with, gives a preparatory plunge or two, and then darts out of the yard.

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